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SHE KISSED MARY ON HER LOVING, LOYAL LIPS (page 37)

THE SUCCESSORS OF MARY THE FIRST

BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

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NOTE

THE writer of these pages wishes to say that, while many of the incidents herein described are not without foundation in fact, they do not reproduce the experience of the household whose history is best known to herself.

. . . . . .

The personal confidences of the woman who enters a house as a domestic employee should be sacredly respected by her employers, whether she succeed or fail; and especially, to my thinking, if she fail. I have in no case portrayed the personality of any woman who has missed giving me satisfaction by her own default or by her own misfortune. I have taken the liberty in one

or two instances of paying public tribute in fictitious form to private virtues which I could not forget if I would. Loyalty in change of fortune, devotion in illness, fidelity to monotonous duty, and affection warmly tendered and returned — these the mistress of a household counts jealously among the treasures of life. For so sacred and so subtle is the power of a human home, that those who have ever formed one family can never be or become to one another like strangers without the gates.

To the unwritten names of the capable, honorable, and lovable women who have given me happiness in giving me service, I inscribe this story.

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS WARD.

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THE SUCCESSORS OF MARY THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

MARY

THE Omniscient Suburbans met on Friday. It was not the lucky day, but Thursday, as everybody knew, was the cooks' "day out." Monday and Tuesday, as we say in our poignant phrase, *are* washing and ironing, and Wednesday and Saturday are baking and cleaning.

The Omniscient Suburbans chose Friday for their club sessions, as a matter of course.

It was now Tuesday. Mrs. George Hollis sat contending with the paper which it was her unhappy fate to prepare for the next

club meeting. Her subject was Architecture and Biology. She had spent some time in trying to find out the connection between architecture and biology, and failed; so now she was determined to go ahead and treat the topic without connections, as seemed to be expected of her. She had written for a few minutes with indifferent satisfaction and uncertain success, and was in the middle of a sentence upon the Corinthian column, when there came a knock at the study door. They did not call it a library at Mr. Hollis's because he was a professional man, and studied in it.

"Come in, Mary," said Mrs. Hollis patiently.

The door opened a few inches, and an invisible person peered through.

"Is it busy ye are?" asked a voice which quavered a little.

"Have n't the chops come?" replied Mrs. Hollis, "or does the stove smoke? or is the" —

"'T ain't the like of that," said Mary. "Don't you bother your head. I 'll come when ye are through."

"Come in an hour," answered Mrs. Hollis pleasantly, and bent to her work again.

Having struggled with the subject of Corinthian columns for some time ineffectually, she set down a few sentences about protoplasm, by way of freshening her intellect, and then laid down her pencil. She could not write. The awful question, What did Mary want? monopolized her brain force.

Mrs. Hollis sat in a brown corduroy Morris chair; she wore a corn-colored cashmere, finished in brown ribbons; her hair and eyes were brown, her complexion was still fresh, her mouth was sweet and resolute, and she had the look of a picturesque and happy woman. Up to the time when our story opens, the cares of life had brushed her kindly. She had good health, good looks, and a charming home. She had a devoted and submissive husband, an affec-

tionate and patronizing daughter. She had a small but comfortable income, and an excellent cook. She was, on the whole, a fortunate woman; indeed, it had never occurred to her how fortunate she was.

It was Tuesday, as we say, but Mrs. Hollis had not been uncommonly busy. She had made the beds; dusted the parlor; ordered the dinner; mended Hazel's bicycle suit; darned Mr. Hollis's golf stockings; mended the hall stair carpet where he had tripped on it last night, and had come down with a kerosene lamp in his hands; gone out to see a sick neighbor; answered seven letters; read the newspaper; cut out a shirt waist for Hazel; practiced a little on the piano for her duet with Hazel; gone over the grocery books; run up half-a-dozen pillow-cases on the machine; put up a hot luncheon for Mr. Hollis and Hazel, and sent it over to the schoolhouse; read the encyclopædia for an hour, covering the articles on architecture and biology; embroidered a pair of pil-

low-shams; received three calls; dressed in the corn-colored cashmere, and sat down to listen for Mr. Hollis's whistle and Hazel's bicycle bell; putting in the time, as has been said, by writing her essay for the Omniscient Suburbans.

Now, to most of the ladies who lived on Mrs. Hollis's street this would have been an exceptional Tuesday; but Mrs. Hollis did not comprehend the force of the fact. She had not washed the dishes. She had not set the table. She had not got the luncheon. She had not even made the dessert. She had not answered the door-bell. Why should she?

Mary did not expect these things of her. Mary had never required Mrs. Hollis to do her work. She was the maid, and not the mistress of that house. And Mary had lived with Mrs. Hollis thirteen years.

Mary had left the door ajar when she went back to the kitchen; the appetizing odors of an excellent dinner stole into the study.

It began to deepen towards dusk. Still Mr. Hollis and Hazel had not come home. Mrs. Hollis put down her paper and pencil, and moved to light the gas-jet which hung over Mr. Hollis's study table. As she did so, Mary came in with a box of safety matches.

"I'll light up," said Mary; "go on with yer piece."

"I thought you'd be a little busy ironing to-day," observed her mistress.

"If I could n't get my ironing done by five o'clock, I'd hire out for a monkey to an organ-grinder!" said Mary contemptuously.

The gas in the hall flared out, as she spoke, and revealed the domestic fully to view. She was a well-built woman, with a pleasant figure, clean calico dress, and spotless white apron. A little ruffle around her neck showed a fair skin, and her sleeves, which were made with a loose cuff, fell upon a well-rounded arm. She was, perhaps,

thirty-three years old, and looked younger. Her hair was of a rich yellow. Her eyes were blue, large. and trustworthy. Her cheeks had a charming color, and her mouth was kind and strong. Mary belonged to a type of woman which threatens to become extinct on our shores. Loyalty to duty, deference to obligations, fidelity to employers, respect for service, delight in honorable work, love of home, and enthusiasm in home-making — these radiated from her personality. She had a decided beauty of her own, and an air of self-respect, which she wore like the coronet of a bygone feudalism. She loved the family with whose lot she had cast her own, and they cordially returned her affection. Between mistress and maid there was pleasant mutual comprehension. The amount of friction in their relation was reduced to the smallest elements with which the life of different classes under the same roof can coexist.

If Mary were cross, it was rare ; and Mrs.

Hollis ignored it. If Mrs. Hollis were quick, why, she had a headache; and Mary forgave her. The two women were truly attached to each other.

"Have you finished your piece?" asked Mary abruptly, moving out of the bright light into a shadowed corner of the study.

"Come and sit down beside me," said Mrs. Hollis kindly. "I see you have something to say, and you need not stand; you 've been ironing all day."

Mary sat down on the edge of a straight, stiff chair, and rolled her hands out of sight in her white apron.

"I thought I 'd give him the croquettes," she observed.

"Is that what you came to say, Mary?"

"I scorched the tail of your petticoat; I 'll do it over again, and get it out."

"That is n't all," said Mrs. Hollis nervously.

She felt an unaccountable sinking at the heart.

"No," answered Mary, trembling, "'t ain't all; there 's more to it that 's the worst of it."

"For Heaven's sake, Mary!" cried her mistress, now in real distress, "explain yourself at once! I can't stand this."

"I 've been with ye thirteen years," said Mary solemnly.

"I expect you to be with me thirteen more," interrupted Mrs. Hollis fervently.

An ominous silence filled the room.

Mrs. Hollis felt her heart leap to her throat. She could not imagine life without Mary. It was almost as impossible as to imagine life without her husband or child.

"It 's me mother!" said Mary, beginning to cry.

"Oh! Has anything happened to her? I know how fond you are of your mother. She is n't dead?"

"Mother of God, forbid!" cried Mary. "It 's herself that 's as fresh an old lady as you 'll find in County Cork. I 'm

wearyin' after her; it 's goin' on fourteen year since I see her face."

"That is a good while not to see one's mother," said Mrs. Hollis softly.

She remembered how she went on to New York three or four times a year to see *her* mother.

"Are you thinking of going to Ireland, Mary?" she asked after a painful pause.

"I want to see me mother," reiterated Mary, throwing her apron over her head and weeping without restraint.

"When do you mean to go?" asked her mistress faintly.

"Oh, I don't know exactly." Mary laughed hysterically. "Some time along next June, after house cleanin'. But don't you fret; it 's long enough off."

Mary rose, pulled down her apron, and made tempestuously for the door. On the threshold she paused.

"I set the world by you and him, and the child, too — but there 's come that achin' in

me for me mother, me mother, me mother! Seems to me if I could see her once, in one of them caps you sent her, comin' to the door to meet me — And I lay awake nights thinkin' if I don't I'll never get the chance."

Mary shut the door softly and went crying into the kitchen. Mrs. Hollis sat quite still.

. . . . . .

The principal of the high school walked home briskly. He was a man of good presence, strong forehead, and a cheerful expression. He had the unmistakable look of a professional man whose wife has always sheltered him from domestic fret, and whose home is a well of rest to him. His eyes were a little dreamy, as if occupied rather with thought than with care, and the curve of his mustache indicated a hidden smile. As he walked up the hill on whose top his home stood (he could already see the gleam of the red hall lantern striking across the road), he

heard a bicycle bell behind him, and his little daughter overtook him with a merry cry.

With the superior manner of the new girl, who regards a parent as belonging to the subject orders of society, and with a voice that was a cross between a telephone girl's and a boy's, the child said, "Hello, Popper!" leaped from her bicycle, and walked beside him, pushing the wheel up the hill. The two came to the door, chatting and laughing; as they turned up the concrete walk, Mr. Hollis whistled with the cheerful double whistle

by which he was accustomed to announce his return to his wife. It was her habit to answer it promptly, and she always ran to the door to meet him. There was no reply to the whistle, and only his old red setter dog limped down the front steps to meet him. He glanced at the window where Mrs. Hollis was apt to stand between the muslin curtains, in the pretty evening gowns that she put on at

twilight, peering out, shielding her eyes with her hands, cut distinctly — a graceful medallion — against the gas-lit room. The window was empty, the room was unoccupied.

"Where can your mother be?" asked Mr. Hollis a little nervously.

"Oh, she's gone up a spout," said Hazel irreverently, and she pushed open the door.

"Mommer! Mommer!"

Mrs. Hollis threw down her pen, and hurried through the hall. She had been too preoccupied to hear her husband's whistle, and the bicycle bell had rung unnoticed. This was an uncommon incident, and Mr. Hollis did not know what to make of it. His wife's expression and manner, too, were unusual. She looked distrait, and rather sober. He missed the usual illumination of her face, and there seemed a lack of fervency in her arms and lips.

"Anything wrong?" asked Mr. Hollis quickly.

She shook her head, smiling, and became herself at once; but she made a visible effort

to do so, which did not escape her husband's notice. She had always been as transparent as the sea of glass, and with no more to conceal. A perplexed loop twisted between her husband's eyes. If Mrs. Hollis had been a flirting woman — But she had never given another man a look, since she had been married, fourteen years ago.

The family sat down to dinner, not in their usual spirits. Mrs. Hollis's chatter was a little irrelevant, and after dinner she hurried back to her writing-desk, which stood in a corner of her husband's study. A half-written note lay upon the desk; she finished and signed it. The note ran thus:

PEACH STREET, SWEET HOME, MASS.
October — 18 — .

MY DEAR MOTHER, — Mary says she is going to Ireland next June. She says she wants to see her mother. What would you advise me to do?

Your affectionate daughter,
PERLEY PEACE HOLLIS.

The old dog Rugby limped from the kitchen, and sat down on the edge of Mrs. Hollis's corn-colored gown, looking wistfully up into her face.

"Has he had his supper?" asked his master.

"Why, of course; Mary never forgets it."

Rugby solemnly put up his paw and shook hands three times, barking reproachfully. In the setter's vocabulary this meant that he was hungry.

"He does n't act as if he had been fed," said Mr. Hollis. "Hazel, take him out into the kitchen and see."

"He has n't had a mouthful," announced Hazel, returning stormily, "and she won't call me Miss Hazel, either. She says she 's shut me up in the closet for stealing cookies too often. And she came here when I was a baby."

"I never knew Mary to forget to feed the dog before," said Mrs. Hollis, with a troubled look.

She evaded the fine sociological point which had been raised by her daughter.

"Oh, it's that fellar," said Hazel scornfully.

"That *fellar?*" repeated both parents in a breath.

The principal of the high school desired to correct his daughter's language, but her mother was not thinking of Hazel at all.

When Hazel had gone to bed, Mr. and Mrs. Hollis sat down before the study fire. It was a late October evening. The furnace had not yet been lighted; so, except in the study, the house was chilly, and seemed a little dismal. But Rugby lay down before the hearth, and snored peacefully, with his head on the yellow embroidered sofa cushion, which he preferred, and which he had dragged from the lounge for his personal use. He was old and spoiled. Like Mary, he had been in the family thirteen years. Mr. Hollis was correcting compositions. Mrs. Hollis was mending another pair of golf

stockings — the green and yellow speckled pair, with a touch of blue and a peppering of red, which no woolens known to the commercial circles of the State could be found to match. As it struck ten o'clock she rolled up the golf stockings (having, in despair, darned them neatly with a purple yarn), and her husband locked up his papers for the night.

"Dear," she began seriously, "I have something to tell you."

She spoke in the tone known only as a precursor of calamity, and her husband said quickly: —

"I knew it. Tell me the worst at once!"

"Well," answered his wife reluctantly, "it's about Mary."

"Mary?" asked the schoolmaster vaguely. "Mary who?"

"Why, George!" cried his wife, with moral rebuke in every feature. "Mary Maloney. *Our* Mary. What other Mary could I possibly mean?"

It occurred to the teacher that there were a few other women of their acquaintance known to history by the name of Mary, but he wisely forbore to remind his wife of this fact, and regarded her with the patient expression which characterized him as a well-trained American husband.

"She's going to Ireland," said Mrs. Hollis in a sepulchral tone.

"When?"

"Next June. She *says* she's going to see her mother," added Mrs. Hollis, as if this made it worse.

"Well," replied Mr. Hollis, "why should n't she?"

"It takes a man," said Mrs. Hollis severely, "it *takes* a man to say that. But, George," she continued in a resounding voice, "that is n't all. When I went out into the kitchen to tell her we'd have waffles, I found a long young man sitting at the other end of the kitchen table."

"A what?" asked her husband, perplexedly frowning.

For thirteen years theirs had been a manless kitchen, and their souls had known the peace thereof.

"Yes," said Mrs. Hollis drearily, "a long young man."

CHAPTER II

THE LONG YOUNG MAN

THE answer to Mrs. Hollis's letter to her mother came by return mail. It ran in this way: —

LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK,
October —, 18.—

MY DEAR PERLEY: —When you reach the bridge, cross it. Then prepare to have it crumble beneath you and let you into a sea of trouble. Don't go under. Strike out and swim, and you 'll either land or drown, and by that time you won't care which. Give Fate her way and she 'll treat you civilly in the long run.

Your affectionate MOTHER.

Mrs. Hollis did not show this letter to her husband. She pondered it thoughtfully and

filed it away in her desk with the rest of her invalid mother's letters.

The burning maples dropped their fires, and the yellow leaves flooded the width of Peach Street, obliterating the concrete sidewalks, and crackling crisply under foot, as the suburbans waded through them to the trains. The autumn set in with its usual cheerful cosiness, and matters went with their accustomed serenity in the Hollis household. The long young man continued to be visible at the kitchen table every Wednesday and Saturday evening. He seemed to be a very respectable young man, and his countenance had a vaguely familiar look.

"You have n't introduced me to your friend, Mary," said Mrs. Hollis one evening.

"He 's cousin to me aunt's second husband on me mother's side," answered Mary promptly, "and he 's come on family business."

The young man rose with his best bow.

"I helped an expressman bring a trunk into your house once, ma'am," he said in a grieved tone, "but you never remembered me to keep up the acquaintance afterward."

"I am sorry," replied Mrs. Hollis gracefully, "that I should have overlooked any friend of Mary's. Are you an expressman too?"

"I was in the ice business in those days," returned the long young man haughtily. "I am a plumber now."

Between mistress and maid a well-preserved silence was sustained upon the topic which was uppermost in the minds of both. On one occasion only did Mrs. Hollis venture to break this discreet reserve.

"I thought, Mary," she observed gently, "that you said you were going to Ireland."

"And it's to Ireland I'd be going," replied Mary stoutly.

"But this person — this young man — You did not tell me anything about the plumber."

"He 's the cousin of me aunt's second husband on me mother's side," insisted Mary, "and he 's come on family business."

There was not a semitone of disrespect in Mary's manner, but its dignity was unapproachable. It was as impossible to intrude on the secrets of her heart as if she had been a princess of the blood. Mary was at that period in a love affair when every woman is a queen, and every other recognizes it.

Winter set in ruggedly. Our suburban friends settled into the accustomed happy cares and busy pleasures which occupy the vigorous weather. For these Mrs. Hollis found, as she had always found, abundant leisure. She had a little world of philanthropies and entertainments which kept her much out of the house, and in which she was expected, like every woman of any social position in our day, to perform important and energetic duties. Her church, her Sunday-school, the Associated Charities, afternoon teas, a whist club, and the Omniscient

Suburbans made heavy claims upon her. For these pleasant interests the state of her household affairs gave her plenty of time. Mary stood at the helm, as she always had, with a firm and skillful hand. The long young man continued to ornament the kitchen. Sometimes, if he stayed a little later than usual, the bread did not rise, or Rugby's feelings were injured; but on the whole the family suffered so little from the courtship of Mary that the phenomenal fact is worthy of record. Mary stood to her duty with a clarity of brain and a soundness of conscience that were an honor to her class. The pouts, the frets, the lapses of the girl who is flattered by her lover and indifferent to her employer, were unknown to the Hollis household.

Mrs. Hollis did not force the girl's confidence, for she respected it as if it had been that of a woman of her own kind, a friend or a neighbor, and she felt that the time for speech had not arrived.

Mary was in that hazy land where the leaf and the grass-blade melt like burning gold, and where the skies are the color of the blush-rose heart; all the fogs are blazing; all the dews are pearls; the rains, like the high cataracts of strange lands, break into mist before they reach the ground. Dreams and passions spring like flowers beneath a foot which spurns the ground. All that womanhood hopes or fears or craves filled the soul of the Irish girl. Yet through the glamour she must move alone, for this beautiful world was the world in which he had not "spoken." Mary held herself proudly, like the most delicate lady of the land. There was that in her manner which distanced intrusion and forbade approach. She turned Hazel out of the kitchen one day for an impudent joke about the plumber; and the child's mother defended the maid and blamed the daughter.

But one evening, when Mrs. Hollis went out into the kitchen, she found Mary with

her hands clasped together at the side of her face, to make a shield between herself and the kerosene lamp. One elbow rested on the table, and her bright, blond head was a little bent. In the shelter of the shadow her blue eyes looked out unguarded at the long young man, who did not any longer sit at the extreme end of the table. There was something so beautiful in the Irish girl's expression — so shy, so gentle, so appealing, as if she begged for mercy from her conqueror before she cast her freedom at his feet, that the lady turned away, and did not speak. Her own eyes were full. She knew now, as well as if she had been told, that Mary had been "asked."

. . . . . .

"George," said Mrs. Hollis in a tone of awe, "that long young man is a plumber. She will be driving with her span while you and I are walking in the dust."

"We have our bicycles," observed her husband serenely.

"Speak for yourself and Hazel," returned his wife.

Mrs. Hollis did not ride a bicycle, and in so far she failed of being a new woman.

The subject of Mary remained uppermost in her mind. It preyed upon her dreams and thoughts; her aspirations and energies were clouded and deadened by it. She went about her winter's work and pleasure with a dull fear of the future, to which her happy life had hitherto been a stranger. She began to listen for the first time with respect to the tales of domestic woe which poured in confidential moments from the lips of her more intimate neighbors. She had always held herself above these experiences, had scorned her friends for being left without a second girl, and despised them for being unable to keep a cook. It had been her firm theory that it was their own fault that things went wrong with the servants. Nothing had ever gone wrong in her household. Why should theirs be in a petty and harrowing turmoil?

The winter passed. Radiant Mary and the long young man continued to occupy the kitchen — now every evening. But Mary preserved the silence of her class upon the subject of her approaching marriage.

"What about your visit to your mother in Ireland, Mary? Have you given that up?" asked Mrs. Hollis boldly, one day in March.

"And it 's to Ireland I 'd be going," persisted Mary. "I want to see me mother, me mother, me mother!"

"What will your plumber say to that?" inquired her mistress.

"It 's none of his plumb business!" flashed Mary. "I 'd like to see the likes of him keep me from me mother!"

She began to cry, as she had done before. Her tears dropped into Mr. Hollis's cup of after-dinner coffee, and Mrs. Hollis hastily changed the subject.

It was in April that Mary sought an interview with her mistress, and the following conversation took place: —

"I have cleaned the attic, three bedrooms and six closets, and the back stairs. I can put in the other bedrooms and the study for yez next week, if ye say so."

"There is no hurry," replied Mrs. Hollis faintly.

"You don't think I 'd be lavin' yez with bit bothers of house cleaning on your mind? You 'll have enough else without it. I thought I 'd do up the parlor curtains to-morrow. And that pair in the guest-room is sort of flimsy. Besides," added Mary, turning suddenly very white, "I 've got yez a girl."

"A who?"

"A girl," said Mary courageously. "I 've engaged her to come in June when — when I go to Ireland to see me mother."

"Dear me, Mary!" gasped Mrs. Hollis.

She got up and crossed the room, and walked about a little, then sat down in the nearest easy chair. She felt quite faint. She could not decide whether to laugh at

Mary's audacity, or to cry at Mary's devotion, and settled the point by doing both.

"There, there!" sobbed Mary, "if ye take on like that, ye'll break me heart. Maybe ye'd rather look her up yourself?"

Mary asked this question with a slow, wondering accent. She found it as impossible to think of Mrs. Hollis living without her as the mistress found it to picture life without the maid, who had served her for thirteen years with a loyalty which friendship might have envied, and of which service should be proud.

"Tell me about this girl, Mary," Mrs. Hollis began again, regaining her composure. "Is she anything like you?"

"She makes better croquettes than me," replied Mary thoughtfully, "but her waffles ain't so crisp. She don't know the true value of sour cream. She 's two years younger than me. Her hair is black as me stove polish. She is somewhat fleshed up since she married."

"*Married!*" cried Mrs. Hollis.

"Well, yes," admitted Mary. "She is a married woman, but she 's been a Back Bay cook, and she 's had her seven dollar a week, and gone as high as eight, and had an offer of ten — until she went and flung herself to pieces on the likes of him. Now she 'll take four and be thankful to mercy for a place like yours. She is a settled-down woman; she won't be gadding nights; she knows her place, and she 'll stay in it. And her graham bread is better than mine. She ain't had but one child, and he flung that down stairs. She buried it this winter, and she says she 'll see him in purgatory, but she is quit of him now."

"But, Mary," remonstrated Mrs. Hollis, "I don't think I want a *married* woman — with a *husband*. What 's the matter with him?"

"Drinks like a codfish," said Mary succinctly. "Beats her over the head with the gridiron. Flung a kerosene lamp at her,

and put a mouse in her bed to frighten her."

"She ought to sue for a divorce!" cried Mrs. Hollis, whose feminine soul rose to resent this final insult to her sex. Kerosene and gridirons could be borne. But a mouse —

"She is quit of him," repeated Mary. "She 'll see him in Charles River, but she 'll never live with him again. I have engaged her to take me place. She will come in and get luncheon for ye the day I go."

"Thank you, Mary," replied Mrs. Hollis, putting her hand to her head. "You are very kind, I am sure. I will consider your plan, and Mr. Hollis and I will talk it over."

"She is as clean as a looking-glass," said Mary, "and as trusty as the Bank of England. She ain't so set on going to Mass as me, and if you was sick, she 'd set up nights with ye, same as I have."

Then Mary's lip began to tremble, and she brought this painful interview to an

abrupt end by asking whether she should make the lobster bisque or the plain pea soup; and added drearily that her name was Mary Maguire.

About this time there came another letter from Mrs. Hollis's mother. It read: —

"Marriage is a School of All Sciences. A husband is the most unmanageable fact in a woman's existence. Mary is a person of valuable experience in several departments of life. Matrimony is not one of them. If it had been, she would not have selected as her successor a married woman. However, it may turn out," etc., etc.

. . . . . .

April and May passed hazily. Years afterwards Mrs. Hollis looked back upon that spring as the borderland between two worlds, — one of innocent peace and one of troubled experience.

The family decided to follow Mary's advice, and Mary Maguire was engaged to take the place. The stranger was pledged to

come in after the wedding, and to begin her duties in time for lunch on the day that Mary should leave to their fate the family which she had cherished so long.

It was a day worthy of Mary when she left the Hollis household as a June bride. She was a charming bride from any point of view, and the long young man sat over an hour in the back yard, while Mrs. Hollis dressed the girl in the white muslin, dainty lace, and bride roses which had been her own wedding present.

"Perhaps you would rather he gave you your flowers?" her mistress had asked hesitatingly.

"As if I 'd take flowers from the likes of him!" said Mary, with a toss of her pretty head. "I ain't lived with *him* for thirteen year, nor been through what you and me have."

"Be careful, Mary," quavered Mrs. Hollis, "you 're crying on your white kid gloves. Hazel, come and tie Mary's sash for her be-

hind, that new way you learned at the dancing class. It's a disappointment to me, Mary, that you would not let me give you a wedding in my parlor. I would have married you as prettily as I would my own daughter."

"We do be married in our Church," said Mary, lifting her head. "We do be married in the morning and have the Nuptial Mass."

The wheels of the wedding hack were heard at the door — the first carriage ever ordered for Mary's use since she had been in that house.

The plumber tramped to and fro impatiently in the kitchen.

"The time has come," said Mrs. Hollis in a cavernous tone.

"Yes 'm," said Mary in her old docile, pretty way, as if she were obeying an order.

She followed her mistress meekly downstairs. Then she stopped in the middle of her irreproachable kitchen — which the bride had got up at four o'clock to leave in immaculate order — and looked around bewildered.

"Tell them to drive to the front door," said Mrs. Hollis.

The plumber went around to the carriage, and Mrs. Hollis drew Mary's trembling hand through her own shaking arm.

"My *dear* girl! My *dear* girl!" she said. "May you bless another home as you have blessed ours!"

"Amen!" said the master of the house, with moisture in his eyes.

"I thought you were going to Ireland to see your mother," viciously put in Hazel, who was apt to be cross when she was touched. But Rugby, the red setter, howled steadily, as if it had been a funeral.

Mary's big blue eyes stared about her like one who had been stunned. She clung to Mrs. Hollis with the great grip of the strong hands which had served her so long, and the two women went down the front steps with their arms about each other.

The long young man tore his bride away and lifted her into the hack. Just as he was

shutting the carriage door, Mary pushed it open, leaped down, and flung herself in her bridal dress upon her mistress's neck. There she clasped her arms, and cried and cried.

"O wisha, wisha! that I should be laving ye! You 'd been that good to me like me mother, me mother! O wisha, wisha! that I should be laving ye for the likes of him!"

"Good-by, dear," sobbed Mrs. Hollis.

Through a storm of tears she kissed Mary on her loving, loyal lips, and put her into the plumber's arms. He shut the door and the carriage rolled away.

But the old dog Rugby followed it, limping painfully. Mary had forgotten to say good-by to Rugby. She had brought him up from a puppy, and fed him, and scolded him, and slapped him, and kissed him, and spoiled him for thirteen years. Rugby cherished some aged and feeble designs on the trouser leg of the long young man, and hobbled after the carriage until it reached the Catholic church. He meant to walk up the broad

aisle with the wedding party; with what intent will never be known, for the sexton thwarted these private plans with the toe of a number ten boot, and Rugby went mournfully homewards.

He met Mrs. Hollis and Hazel, a little way down the street, hurrying to the wedding, and proposed to return with them to the church.

"Go home, Rugby!" said Mrs. Hollis, "and take care of the house. There 's a woman coming whom you don't know. The key is under the door mat. Don't touch her when she takes it, but let her in, like a gentleman."

Rugby, who understood the full force of these directions, went obediently home.

. . . . . .

It was high noon, and rather warm. Mrs. Hollis and Hazel were tired with the excitement of the wedding day, and walked home slowly from the Catholic church.

"Mary Maguire was to hurry ahead and

get there before we do," observed Mrs. Hollis. "She must have lunch nearly ready now."

"I shall go up a spout, if she has n't," replied Hazel pettishly. "I am hungry enough to eat a set of plumber's tools."

"I suppose we have had our minds occupied with plumbers," observed Mrs. Hollis, with a smile which she felt to be fatuous, for as they approached the house her quick eye had discerned an ominous fact. The back door was closed, as they had left it.

"It 's so warm, I should think she would have opened it and fastened the screen door," suggested the mother uneasily.

"Oh, she 's probably a dunce," replied Hazel, with the comforting pessimism of youth. "I expect we are going to have high jinks now."

When the mother and daughter entered the front yard, a hoarse bronchial bark, answered by sobs and shrieks, fell upon their startled ears.

Hazel ran. Mrs. Hollis hurried after her. They passed the back door, and turned the corner of the house. There, on the side porch, stood Rugby, stolidly defying the entrance of a small Irish caddie, who wore, pinned to the outside of his jacket, a letter in a yellow envelope. He had on little rusty black golf stockings, out of which Rugby had taken several mouthfuls. The orders had been to admit a woman, not a boy, and Rugby stood to his orders. Mary Maguire was not to be seen.

"She 's detained at the wedding, I suppose," began Mrs. Hollis weakly.

"No, she is n't; she 's gone up a spout," persisted Hazel. "I told you so."

Mrs. Hollis unpinned the letter from the boy's jacket, and Hazel came and looked over her shoulder while she read: —

DEAR MADAM MRS. HOLLIS, — Our expectations are at an end. I am very sorry to be the caús of causing ye so much trubble, but

god is my witness I cant do any other way. me Husband he has come home sober he has took the Pledge for Life. He says he has a clam on me and he will go to the Divil if I dont go back to him. I hope you will suit yourself to someone else that aint got no clams and I am sorry to be afther trubblin ye but being you are a Wife yourself you won't think hardly of me.

Yours respectful,

Mrs. Mary Maguire.

Mr. Hollis came up the walk at that moment. He, too, was tired and hungry. The fire was low in the stove, and the silent kitchen called for Mary from every shelf and faucet.

Mrs. Hollis handed her husband the letter in silence. The principal of the high school read it and laid it down with his dreamy, scholastic smile.

"She spells Husband with a capital H and god with a small g," he said, with a pleased

air of scientific interest. But Mrs. Hollis said nothing at all.

She went out to get luncheon — a thing she had not done twenty times in thirteen years. She had forgotten how. She did not know her way around Mary's spotless and orderly pantry. She had no definite idea what was in her refrigerator. She needed a directory around her kitchen.

Hazel did not offer to help her.

Rugby was the only member of the deserted family who exhibited any ease or cheerfulness. He found himself fully occupied with the caddie, whom he escorted home with a vigor worthy of a younger and handsomer dog. Peacefully chewing mouthfuls of rusty black golf stockings, he came back and asked where Mary was, to give him his dinner. Golf stockings, however appetizing, lacked a certain nourishing quality; yet they seemed to be all that Rugby was likely to get that noon.

CHAPTER III

MARY THE FOURTH

It would be difficult for a household in which the process of off with the old girl and on with the new has become chronic, to understand the consternation produced in the Hollis family by the position in which they now found themselves.

Mrs. Hollis was a woman of brains, sense, ability, and average health, and she set herself to the duties before her without a whimper. But how perplexing and exhausting she found them she would have been ashamed to say. Mary had so long conducted the household, and all that was therein, that its mistress found herself adrift in her own home.

For several days she performed the entire work of the house alone. She succeeded in

getting Hazel to make her own bed and dust half the piano, but that young lady's household accomplishments fell short at the bass octaves, omitted the piano stool, and ignored the remainder of the parlor.

Mrs. Hollis had always cherished views about the proper education of daughters in domestic affairs, and she was shocked to find, at the first emergency, that her own daughter was a flat failure. It was humiliating, but it was the truth, that she was better off without Hazel than with her.

It was a relief when the child banged the door and whirred away on her bicycle to school, tempestuously calling, "Popper! Popper! Let's coast downhill and go to smash!"

Hazel left the dishes undone, the beds unmade, the house unswept, and the kitchen uncleaned; while her mother patiently performed the frowning tasks with which for thirteen years she had been unfamiliar. She found it easier to do anything alone than to

make her daughter share it, and after a few days' battle, in simple self-defense she surrendered the attempt to keep Hazel in the ranks.

"I 'll have it out with her some time," she thought. "I 'll teach her when we 're not in such a scrape."

Five or six days after Mary's departure the schoolmaster came home one evening and brought two gentlemen to dinner, one of whom he had warmly invited to spend the night, while he regretted to say that the other must take the ten o'clock train to town. Hazel was entertaining six very young ladies in the parlor. One of these she had asked to stay to dinner. Mr. Hollis did not whistle as he approached the house; he did not, very often, when he brought company; for some mysterious, masculine reason, impenetrable by the feminine mind, he seemed to feel a little ashamed to.

Visions of a charming wife in pale yellow

organdie flitted hazily before him as he let himself in the front door. He turned proudly to present his friends to this enviable spectacle, and his face fell when he saw that the hall was empty. He went from room to room calling, "Perley, Perley, my dear! I've brought some old friends to dine."

It was some time before it occurred to him that he must seek his wife in the kitchen.

There he found her in her morning dress, with one of Mary's old checked aprons covering her from neck to foot. The disorder of a four-course dinner in its final stages piled the kitchen. Mrs. Hollis was doing something with gravy in a pan upon the stove. It was a hot summer night, and the unaccustomed cook suffered so severely from her occupation that she presented nothing less than an alarming sight.

Her scarlet face had turned purple, and her eyes had the fixed and brilliant stare

which indicates as much congestion as a pretty steady brain may care to risk.

The schoolmaster uttered a low exclamation, caught his wife in his arms, and carried her to the back door. He dashed cold water in her face from the laundry faucets, and called loudly for Hazel to find him ice.

"I don't know where she keeps her old ice!" cried Hazel, running in.

"It's time you did," said her father sternly. "Hunt it up, crack some, and put it on your mother's head. She is ill."

"What a shame!" observed Hazel. "I'd asked Popsie to dinner."

Her father's rebuke died on his lips. His own eyes fell guiltily. More thoughtless than Hazel, he, too, had brought company to dinner; and at that moment two very distinguished men were sitting hungry and neglected in the parlor.

"Oh, it's nothing," pleaded Mrs. Hollis as soon as she could speak. "I've had a

bad headache all day, and just as you came in, George, something seemed to happen, and everything went round and round before me. I'm all right now."

"I am glad you are," returned her husband penitently, "for to tell you the truth, my dear, I've brought two gentlemen to dinner. There is only one of them going to stay all night" —

"Oh, George!" cried Mrs. Hollis.

She was a hospitable woman. All their life good health and good service had enabled her to entertain her husband's friends with the royal welcome that every man likes to see offered his guests by his wife. In fact, she enjoyed nothing more than to make him happy in this, as in so many other unnoticed and half-prized ways. But now she said wearily: —

"Oh, you poor dear! You forgot, did n't you? There is nobody in this house to do anything but me. But perhaps if Hazel would put the spare room in order — or

help a little about the dishes" — And with that she laid her head back on her husband's shoulder, and Hazel's cracked ice fell with a thud on the floor. For the first time in many years Mrs. Hollis had fainted away.

They got her to bed as soon as she came to herself, and sent for a neighbor (who was one of the Omniscient Suburbans) to come and sit by her for a while.

Then the schoolmaster took hold of the situation as best he could. The dreamy look in his eyes faded into the dark expression of bewildered resolve. His first move was to send Popsie home. His second was to explain to his two distinguished friends that they must excuse a little domestic incoherence (this was his word), because Mrs. Hollis had been taken suddenly ill. Then he vigorously commanded Hazel to turn to and get the dinner. Hazel pouted, fretted, but obeyed.

The Omniscient Suburban stole down the

back stairs to offer some advice when the odor of things burning vigorously permeated the entire house. But in the main, Hazel got up that dinner alone. Her father and his eminent friends starved in the parlor for an hour and a quarter. At the end of that time Hazel announced that dinner was ready, and they sat down to the following result: —

Tomato Soup — stone cold.

Haddock — burned as black as the stove pipe. (This feat had been accomplished by laying the broiler flat upon the coals.)

Potatoes — delicately flavored with kerosene.

Raw Tomatoes — thickly blanketed with pepper. (One of the distinguished guests, who had rose cold in June, sneezed all night.)

Roast Beef — fifty minutes overdone.

Lukewarm Coffee — the color of stylographic ink.

The only thing that could be eaten was a custard pie, for which Hazel had no further responsibility than that of bringing it from the pantry to the table.

The two eminent gentlemen fell to upon the pie, ate it voraciously, and praised it with an excessive enthusiasm which was as noticeable as their highly developed silence concerning the rest of the menu.

When the Omniscient Suburban came down the front stairs at last, reported Mrs. Hollis better, and kindly volunteered to go out and make some possible coffee, the spirits of the three men rose, and they conversed on the highest themes with the greatest enthusiasm until half-past nine, when both of the guests had the grace to take the ten o'clock train for town.

"Why don't you have an emergency woman?" said the Omniscient Suburban in an energetic whisper, as Mr. Hollis gratefully bade her good-night in the front vestibule.

"What is an emergency woman, Mrs. Voisin?" asked Mr. Hollis stupidly.

In thirteen happy years their house had never known the need of the ministrations of this useful and honorable class of society.

Even a washerwoman had not been required within their doors. They were destitute of relations with the trades that thrive on the troubles of disordered households.

"I 'll send you some one in the morning," said the Omniscient Suburban in a pitying voice, as she closed the door.

. . . . . .

The next morning at six o'clock the little caddie appeared. His name, it seemed, was Young Nick, to distinguish him from his father, who was called Old Nick. His mother went by the name of Mary Nick, and Young Nick came with the offer of his mother's services to the bereaved household. Young Nick could not be induced to go to the back door, for a sacred horror of Rugby still possessed his soul; so he rang the front door bell forcibly and continuously until Mr. Hollis came down in his pajamas to see what was wanted.

"Me mother will accommodate ye for a dollar a day," said Young Nick, with the

early acquired hauteur of the class which feels that it has its superior at a disadvantage. "But she says," added Young Nick, "that she can't have that red-headed dog a-wollopin' me."

The schoolmaster was not a rich man, and a dollar a day meant a great deal to him, but he accepted the terms without a question.

Mary Nick arrived at eight o'clock, got up an excellent breakfast in half an hour, and took the distressed household into her experienced and good-natured, if grasping hands. The first thing she did was to demand damages for the rusty black stockings which Rugby had destroyed; but Mrs. Hollis was so grateful that morning for Mary Nick's very existence, that she gave her three pairs of Mr. Hollis's golf stockings to cut over for Young Nick. There would be three pairs less to darn, at any rate.

She spent most of the day in bed, trying

to rest. But her mind whirled monotonously around the situation in which she found herself. What should she do?

That afternoon Mrs. Hollis received one of her mother's brief but useful letters: —

My dear Perley: — Trouble is like a twisted chain. It is sometimes necessary to snap it, to straighten it. Break up entirely. Go to the seaside and board, as soon as the term is over. Take all summer, if necessary, to find a suitable woman, and start in fresh and strong in the fall.

Mr. Hollis knew very well that he had a valuable mother-in-law. He was truly attached to her, partly, perhaps, because he had found in thirteen years of married life that she never interfered in his affairs, unless her advice were sought. He could not remember that he had ever regretted following it. He took it this time without a question, and the family engaged board

for the summer at a cheap and quiet house in Fairharbor.

For the remainder of the high school term the Hollis household depended upon the experienced and expensive services of Mary Nick. They called her Mary the Third, in deference to the invisible shade of Mary Maguire.

Just before the family left home for the summer, Mary Maguire, in a moment of creditable penitence for the wrongs that she had inflicted upon them, offered a third cousin to perform the services which she had so ingloriously relinquished.

The name of this applicant was Mary O'Harrigan. Inquiries proved Mary O'Harrigan to be a promising girl, and she was engaged to fill the clamoring vacancy on the opening of the second week in September.

A delightful summer rested the bodies and calmed the souls of our afflicted friends. The vigor that only Fairharbor winds and waves can give blew into their blood; and

the poetry that only Fairharbor shores and downs can offer relaxed the tense nerves of the schoolmaster and his wife.

Hazel had a better time than she deserved. She bathed, and rowed, and sailed, and danced, and tramped, and flirted, to her exacting heart's content. She was as brown as the nut whose pretty name she bore, before the August fogs breathed over the Point, and the August crowds mobbed the boarding-houses and hotels.

Her father and mother were, in their way, as happy. At first they found boarding a manner of life so agreeable that they talked quite seriously of going out to their meals when they went home.

"Mrs. Learner is n't half a mile away," suggested Mrs. Hollis. "If we get hard pushed — if Mary O'Harrigan is n't a *very* nice girl — we could go over there."

"I wonder we never thought of it," replied her husband heartily.

But by August they ceased to talk of Mrs.

Learner's. Boarding-house life had run its career for them. Delightful for the first three weeks, tolerable for the next two, doubtful for the weeks succeeding, it was fast becoming melancholy. A summer play, it ran to its last act rapidly. Visions of their own sweet and quiet home began to flit upon them. They dreamed of their own dinner table with its privacy and peace; of the study fire, of the books, the pictures, and their white-draped bedrooms. With pangs of self-reproach they remembered Rugby, boarded for the summer with the generous Omniscient Suburban, Mrs. Voisin, and mourning his old heart out, believing himself deserted — he who had never been separated from his family for thirteen years.

The worst of it was that in all their dreams of home and its blisses the figure of Mary, their own Mary, reigned with tantalizing distinctness. It seemed incredible that she would not be there when they got back, smoothing the roughness out of their lives,

and crowding these with half-appreciated comforts as she had done so long. But Mary had moved to Boston, thence to New York. It seemed that no smaller sphere would satisfy the soul of her plumber.

"Don't mention Mary," said Mr. Hollis with unusual vehemence. He paced the boarding-house piazza, humming, —

> "'T is madness to remember,
> 'T were better to forget."

. . . . . .

The second week in September found our friends anxiously hurrying to their own home. Rugby had been told that they were expected, and had come down to the station to meet them. There was something heart-breaking in the welcome of the old dog. He had grown thin and wan, and it was weeks before the reproach died out of his eyes.

"We did a wicked thing to leave him," said Mrs. Hollis. "I 'll never do it again."

Rugby stood up and put his paws around her neck ; he laid his head upon her shoulder,

and kissed her pretty ear. Rugby's heart was too full to say much, and he lay down upon the hem of her dress, fastening her to the trunk on which she was sitting, with the air of a dog who meant to keep her where she was this time.

Mary O'Harrigan was at her post, which she filled admirably. The house was opened, sunned, and aired ; the luncheon was cooked and served. The new Mary went about her duties with skill, neatness, and good humor. A mountain's weight was lifted from the heart of Mrs. Hollis.

There was rose in the skies, and the September glamour on the soft, suburban scenery stole into the house. The family went about their home in ecstasy. They could have kissed the very carpets.

"I believe our troubles are over," smiled the mistress of the house. "I think we have a treasure."

She checked herself, disturbed at finding this trite and vulgar phrase upon her lips.

Something which she had begun to say about pop-overs collapsed on her tongue. Was she growing to talk of nothing but her servants?

Her husband regarded her with his dreamy smile.

Mrs. Hollis's impression of Mary the Fourth, however rashly formed, proved to be well founded. Mary O'Harrigan was all that an average suburban home could expect or require in its domestic department. She took hold of the family affairs with an able hand, and several weeks of happiness marked the opening of her career. She was a Catholic; in fact, she was very Catholic, and she found it necessary to frequent a large number of religious services; but as these seemed to improve her character rather than to interfere with her duties, Mrs. Hollis raised no objection to them; although it occurred to her that they were growing in number and zeal. But the lady forbore to discuss the subject; and now feeling at ease

about her household affairs, she turned, for the first time since Mary's marriage, to her own duties and pleasures with a sense of lost freedom regained.

One Saturday afternoon in October Mary the Fourth asked permission to go to confession, adding that her baking and cleaning were done, and that she would be home in early season to get the dinner. Mrs. Voisin and another Omniscient Suburban were coming to dine that night.

"Certainly, but don't walk home by the railroad," cautioned Mrs. Hollis, "the way you did last time. It 's too dark for that now, and I 'd rather you would be a little later, and come around."

"It 's not by the railroad I 'd be coming," said Mary O'Harrigan.

She closed the door of her shining kitchen and ran smartly down the walk. She was a young woman, and graceful on her feet.

"Popsie told me she was the best dancer of all the girls round here," said Hazel.

Mrs. Hollis went out on some errand that afternoon and did not return until five o'clock. She found no one but Rugby in the house. It came to be half-past five, and Mary the Fourth had not returned.

The sun fell, and the soft tide of the dusk began to gather in the suburban shrubbery. Mrs. Hollis anxiously went out and shook the kitchen fire. In trepidation she set the table. Mr. Hollis came home, but only stared when asked if he had seen anything of Mary O'Harrigan. It came to be quarter of six — five minutes of six. The kitchen remained empty and silent.

It was now almost dark. At six o'clock Hazel dashed up to the house on her bicycle, and wildly thrust open the door. The child's face was frightfully white, and she was shaking from head to foot with horror.

"She 's gone up a spout this time!" cried Hazel. "She 's killed! Mary O'Harrigan 's killed on the railroad! The train ran smash over her. Oh, my gracious to

goodness! I was at the station and I saw it all!"

Mr. Hollis put on his hat and ran out. His bicycle was leaning against the porch. Mrs. Hollis snatched the nearest thing she could find — it happened to be a waterproof — and hurried after him. At the station she found a huddled and excited group.

Mary O'Harrigan — its ghastly central figure — lay upon the baggage truck. She was not killed, but she would never dance again. Hurrying home from confession to be in time to get dinner, she had taken the forbidden short cut along the railroad track. It was the very old story — the story in which one steps aside to avoid a train and finds one's self in the thundering clutch of another. A swift and powerful stop had saved the girl's life, but she was fearfully crushed. Some one had gone for the priest. A surgeon was there, and the ambulance. They were lifting the unconscious woman into it as Mrs. Hollis came trembling up.

"Some lady should go with her," said the surgeon, looking about.

Without a word Mrs. Hollis climbed into the ambulance. She sat down by the surgeon and took the girl's head upon her lap. It was fortunate that she had worn her waterproof, but she did not think of that. She heard the door of the ambulance lock upon them, and the driver jolted off. She had never had a thing like this to do before in all her life, and it mortified her to find that she was growing light-headed.

What if she should faint again — she who had always prided herself on not being a fainting woman! The ambulance had traveled half a mile when an authoritative voice ordered it to a halt. The driver reined up in deference to the commands of Mr. Hollis. Hazel was beside him on her bicycle. Mrs. Hollis heard the key fumbling in the lock.

"Get out, Mommer!" cried Hazel shrilly. "You 're the color of a sheet and pillow-

case party. *I'll* hold Mary O'Harrigan. It won't faze *me* any. You get out and go home with Popper."

Mrs. Hollis, now quite dazed, obeyed. Hazel climbed into the ambulance boldly, and the girl who could not get up a dinner, heroically held the mutilated and bleeding woman in her arms all the way to the hospital, — a ride nearly three miles long.

CHAPTER IV

EDDA

When Mr. and Mrs. Hollis got home, they found the house lighted, and the inviting odors of a hot meal crept into the dining-room.

Rumor of the catastrophe had preceded them, and their guests, the two Omniscient Suburbans, had prettily gone into the kitchen and cooked the dinner.

Hazel came in an hour later, with brilliant eyes and burning cheeks, and was surprised to find herself the heroine of the occasion. The daughter of the period experienced the rare pleasure of self-sacrifice, and for the moment found it more agreeable than making her mother wait on her. The Omniscient Suburbans ventured to offer condolence to the afflicted family.

"She was such a nice girl," urged Mrs. Hollis. "Really, I had no particular fault to find with her. I never had a person in my house hit by an express train before. It seems to me that Providence must have gone out of his way."

Mr. Hollis murmured something flatly unintelligible. His brain, like his wife's, seemed to be staggering.

It had never occurred either to him or to her that a cook *could* be run over by an express train. It seemed to them that the wrath of Heaven had especially singled them out.

The Omniscient Suburbans consoled them with a consolation which was drearier than the blow itself.

They should remember that the domestic problem, at best, was but a choice of misfortunes. The universal lot had only taken particular expression in their case. She might have been drunk, or crazy, immoral, dishonest, or even insolent.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hollis faintly. "I never knew any girls like that."

"You have never known any girls," said the Omniscient Suburban compassionately. "*You've* had Mary. We all take it out, somehow. We all take our turns at it. Something happens everywhere. You have got a railroad accident. It might have been anything. You ought to thank your stars it 's no worse. You got her well out of the house."

This seemed a little cold-blooded to Mrs. Hollis. She still felt herself to be sitting in the jolting ambulance with the bleeding and agonized woman in her arms. Poor Mary the Fourth!

"The doctor says she'll be lucky if he does n't have to amputate both legs," cried Hazel.

"Poor, poor girl!" sighed Mrs. Hollis.

A momentary silence touched the group. Husband and wife and daughter looked tenderly at each other, and the guests exchanged

thoughtful glances. At least, they had their homes, and each other. They had their lives and limbs, and health and love.

The emigrant girl, three thousand miles from home, lay babbling of green Ireland and calling for her mother till the nurses turned away; for the wail went to their hearts.

For brave endurance of sheer homesickness, who in all our restless land surpasses the Irish housework girl? Who has more pluck? Who has fewer friends? Who receives less sympathy?

"She'll never dance again," repeated Hazel. "She cut me hot cake every time I wanted it. She called me Miss Hazel, and I am going to the hospital to see her every day."

The schoolmaster had a long evening's work before him, but there was no help for it. He put on his hat and went out to engage the services of Mary Nick. To make up for lost time, he sat at his desk until one

o'clock in the morning. His wife went to bed with a blind sick headache.

Hazel developed an unprecedented if temporary domestic genius. She went out and emptied the refrigerator pan, whose overflow had irrigated the kitchen floor with rills and rivers, lakes and pools, in which the whole family had contrived to wet their feet.

. . . . . .

The next applicant for the vacant situation was a big, blue-eyed, straw-haired Swede. She came with a reference from an Omniscient Suburban, and was accepted without a question. The name of the newcomer was Edda. She proved to be as neat as dandelion down, and very fond of the grocer. There was only one ominous thing about her. At an early stage in her career, she developed a tendency to toothache. By the time she had been with the family about three weeks, this dental malady had become chronic. On an average, Edda required four

afternoons a week to see her dentist, and during such time as she honored the household with her presence she tied her face in a big blue and white handerchief, which did not forcibly add to her personal attractiveness. She wore it in the dining-room; she wore it to the front door; she ate in it, and Heaven only knows whether she slept in it. In it she admitted the mayor and the superintendent of schools; and in it she waited on two luncheons and one dinner party.

One morning just before Thanksgiving Day Edda did not come down to get breakfast.

"She says she's got the toothache," fretted Hazel, standing by to see her mother start the kitchen fire.

"It 's a queer kind of toothache," suggested Mrs. Hollis, with a troubled face, as she came down from her first visit to the girl's room. "It seems to strike a good way down her throat for a toothache. She wants we should send for her dentist."

"I shall telephone for a doctor," said Mr. Hollis with unwonted energy. He did so, on his way to school, and the doctor came about ten o'clock.

He went up to the cook's room indifferently, with a smiling face. When he came down he did not smile. He called Mrs. Hollis into the study, and shut both doors.

They were a healthy family, and so seldom required the services of a doctor that this one really knew very little about them.

"How many children have you, madam, in your family?" he began. "How old? — No babies? — How long have you had this woman?"

"Less than a month."

"Do you know anything about her friends? What streets she visits?"

"I don't know anybody she visits but her dentist. She has a profounder capacity for toothache than any person I ever knew."

"You don't happen to know of her having friends in Happy Valley, do you?"

"I should hope not!"

"I am confident that I have seen this girl in Happy Valley several times. Does n't she wear a blue handkerchief around her face? I suppose you know there is an epidemic of diphtheria there."

Mrs. Hollis uttered a low, inarticulate exclamation. Words deserted her absolutely.

"There 's no use mincing matters," said the doctor abruptly. "The woman has diphtheria. You had better let me notify the hospital at once. This is the advantage," added the doctor proudly, "of our contagious ward."

"Send a sick girl out of the house? Why, I have never done such a thing in my life!"

"Have you ever had an infectious disease in your house?" asked the doctor grimly. He added, "Have you any other servants?"

"No."

"Should you expect to get another under the circumstances?"

"I don't — I have never tried," faltered the lady.

"Can you do the housework and nurse the girl? You will have to be isolated in her room, you know."

Mrs. Hollis turned as white as her cream-colored morning sack.

"Shall I get you a nurse?" asked the doctor. "That would be thirty-five dollars a week, for an infectious case. Your house and family, madam, will be quarantined for weeks — even if no other case of the disease appears. Your child will not be permitted to attend school. Your husband — why, good heavens, madam! Your husband is the principal of the high school! He would be quarantined with the rest of you, and not permitted to leave the house."

Mrs. Hollis sank back in the brown corduroy Morris chair. Her head spun. Her stiffening lips moved with difficulty. Rugby brought the yellow sofa pillow and lay down on it at her feet, to comfort her.

"You may send for the ambulance, doctor," she said meekly. "I will not wait to consult Mr. Hollis."

"They don't send the ambulance for infected patients," answered the doctor brusquely. "There's a hack reserved for such cases. Shall I telephone the hospital?"

Mrs. Hollis bowed a dumb assent, and the doctor left her alone with the sick girl and her own desperate reflections.

When Mr. Hollis and Hazel came home from school, they met what appeared to be a funeral carriage slowly driving out of their front yard. Within was Edda on a comfortable bed, laid across the cushions, and beside her sat a white-capped hospital nurse.

Hazel bounced in at the front door. Mr. Hollis climbed the steps reluctantly, with the prescience of fresh calamity heavy on his heart. The odor of burning sulphur filled the house. The Board of Health, represented by its fumigator, an unduly jocose person, was already at work in Edda's room.

The fumigator was a lean and mysterious man. In point of fact, he was an excellent fellow, but he seemed to Mrs. Hollis to have the eye of a frivolous ghoul. With it he inspected Mr. Hollis severely as he came downstairs.

"Many children in this house?"

"Only one."

"How old?"

"Twelve."

"Your business? Why — ain't you Master Hollis, of the Arnold School?"

"That 's my name."

"Sho!" said the fumigator. With this sinister exclamation he left the house.

Before night the family had received an official notification from the city. Pending further developments, to avoid all possibility of danger, the principal was forbidden to enter his own school for the space of two weeks. This quarantine, of course, included Hazel.

When the family had braced themselves

to meet this unexpected disaster, they asked Edda's favorite grocer to send Mary Nick to their assistance. But Mary Nick sent Young Nick back with a written reply. As soon as Rugby perceived his master's golf stockings on the caddie, he smiled wickedly, and took the lawn in three bounds. The boy dropped the letter and ran. Rugby chewed the envelope ecstatically for a while, and then brought it to his mistress.

She read it and put it into the fire without so much as a sigh. Nothing surprised her now.

Mary Nick had lost her cousin Bridget and a grandmother by diphtheria; and she declined the opportunity to serve, at that crisis, in the Hollis household.

"We must go over to Mrs. Learner's and board," cried Mrs. Hollis desperately, when the family gathered that evening to face their fate.

"You forget, my dear," said her husband gently, "that we can't go to Mrs. Learner's.

She would not want us now. Nobody will want us."

. . . . . .

George Hollis was of a philosophical temperament, and after some reflection on the circumstances he propounded the following apothegm to his wife: —

"All affliction is an opportunity. Up to this time we, as a family, have not had our share of its privileges. I propose now that we turn them to some practical account."

"If you see any privilege" — began Mrs. Hollis. But she checked herself, ashamed and silent.

"I propose," suggested Mr. Hollis, "that we occupy this fortnight of enforced retirement by performing a long-neglected duty. I propose that we give our daughter the valuable opportunity of gaining a domestic education."

"George," said Mrs. Hollis solemnly, "it would be easier for me to take in washing; it would not be so hard to go out scrub-

bing; I would rather clean offices on Devonshire Street. I think it would be less exhausting to saw wood; it would have been play to take care of a diphtheria case, and do all the housework, too."

Mr. Hollis smiled indulgently, but made no immediate reply. He never interfered with his wife's management of her household affairs, and seldom with that of their daughter. When he did, he had his way; and he had it this time.

An official interview between Hazel and her father took place in his study the next morning. Its details will never be known to history. It lasted an hour, and it was not without its signs of agitation. When it was over Hazel came out crying, but went meekly to the kitchen.

"Clear out, Mommer!" she said sullenly. "Popper says I 've got to get this old dinner. I hope he 'll enjoy eating it," added Hazel viciously. "He says he wants you to go into the study and read to him."

"Don't be troubled, dear," soothed the mother. "I'll make it easy for you."

"I guess you'd better!" snapped Hazel.

"We'll all go somewhere in town and get a Thanksgiving dinner," added the girl's mother, in the old foolish, indulgent way that she had pursued too long.

Somewhat to her surprise, Mrs. Hollis found that her husband required to be read to several hours a day during the fortnight of their partial quarantine. He appeared to have some weakness of the eyes, of which she had never heard before. At all events he kept her at his side, and among their books.

She was a very pleasant reader, and he occupied her with indiscriminate material, — newspapers, magazines, reviews, history, poetry, science.

"George," she observed abruptly one day, laying down a heavy political article, "I believe you are doing this because you thought my brain was getting addled over housework."

"Well?" said her husband critically.

"You can't deceive me," retorted his wife. "You never did."

George Hollis arched his eyebrows slowly, but made no reply.

Mrs. Hollis read on with a rabid perseverance, but she would have been ashamed to tell her husband how her mind slid from the track. She observed that he was writing as she read, and was not surprised, but irrationally hurt, when that evening he presented her with the following notes of her efforts, taken verbatim during the day: —

"Or again, suppose that the invasion is undertaken for the purpose of overcooking the existing government."

"But on examining the state of the conquerors, we find that they do not leave the laundry as they came upon it."

"Farewell! those forms, that in thy noontide shade
Rest near their little plots of oatmeal glade."

"Now Dante himself, we think, gives us the clue, by following which we may recon-

cile the contradiction between the Lady of the Vita Nuova who made him unfaithful to Bridget" —

Mrs. Hollis put her hands before her face; head and hands sank to her knees.

"Why, Perley! Why, Perley! You 're not *crying?*"

The mischief in the schoolmaster's eyes went blankly out. He took the sobbing woman in his arms, and closed her quivering lips with a tremendous kiss. This reparation went further than volumes of apology. Her arms crept about his neck, and she laid the wet velvet of her cheek to his.

"George, you *can't* know. There is n't a man who lives that ever can know."

"I grant it, my dear! I grant it beforehand!" cried her husband abjectly. "The masculine race is born without common human intelligence. Concede that to start on."

"If you lived our lives," returned Mrs. Hollis solemnly, "I don't know where you

would be. It would take away the modicum of sense with which it has pleased God to endow you. When you see that even we — and it's in our blood, and we've done these maddening things for generations — even we give out on them, as we do, and become the tomfools we are — I say, George, where would you be? My brain," added Mrs. Hollis in a reverberating tone, "my brain is becoming overdone — even for a woman without a girl — it is really overcooked; like eggs — a new way each time it is served."

"A sort of scrambled omelette?" suggested her husband, thinking that he had hit on something really scintillant.

"There never has been such a thing known to history as a scrambled omelette," returned Mrs. Hollis, without troubling herself to smile, "and that just proves it."

"Proves what?"

"Why, what I said about the inferiority of the masculine intellect."

Mr. Hollis blinked. But he did not presume to reply.

"It is the first of December," continued Mrs. Hollis, "and we have n't got beyond Mary Nick yet. She 's coming to-morrow. But she can't stay more than a week; she 's got Mrs. Voisin's curtains to do up."

It occurred to her that the time had been when she would not have bothered her husband with the petty reason for the petty incident, but have simply said: "She can't stay;" or, indeed, have said nothing at all about Mary Nick.

"I am going to pieces," she thought. "My brain is chopped to hash." But aloud she said: "I am going to an intelligence office to-morrow. It has come to that."

The next morning the schoolmaster and Hazel, being out of quarantine, went back to school. Mrs. Hollis left the house in the care of Mary Nick, and took an early train to town.

It was her first errand of the kind. She

SHE GAVE ONE LOOK AND FLED THE PLACE

did not know anything about the social rank of intelligence offices, and was ashamed to ask. She went into the first place of the sort that she came to, and with a moral horror which she could hardly have justified, slowly ascended two long flights of unswept stairs and pushed open a squeaking and uncleaned door.

The room into which she hesitated to admit herself was full to overflowing. Torrents of foul air rushed out upon her. Inhalations peculiar to the lower order of intelligence offices smote her in the lungs like an asphyxiating poison.

As for the women within the room, they blurred before her. She gave one look and fled the place.

CHAPTER V

THE NON-INTELLIGENCE OFFICE

THE pleasant suburb in which our troubled friends had lived for the greater part of their married lives, and which bore the bewitching name of Sweet Home, had distinction from this circumstance. It was estimated by real-estate dealers that the name alone added fifty per cent to their business every fall, and half as much more each spring. Any attempt to change the pretty swinging sign in the station would have been stolidly defied by every commercial man in town. Sweet Home was but one of many precincts in the suburban city under whose government it was enrolled, but on account of its name was more familiar to the public than all the rest.

When the autumn dandelions began to

burn in the closely cropped and vivid grass, scores of young married people bought tickets for Sweet Home. When the wild strawberry blossoms starred the banks of the unaccepted roads, when the saxifrage and violets trustfully opened in the sunny unsold lots, hundreds of couples, visibly under thirty, roamed the cheerful streets with the too serious face of house-hunter, and tramped over empty, echoing cottages (of seven rooms or nine), seeking the elusive Holy Grail of the ideal House.

The regular commuters on the train grew quite familiar with the faces of these strangers before they became visible or taxable neighbors.

When Mrs. Hollis came out from her visit to her first intelligence office, a tired-looking little person in a dark-green, ready-made suit ventured to address her.

"I saw you going in on the 8.20. Can you tell me? — I am a stranger; we've just rented such a nice house on Peach Street, but

I have n't found a cook yet. Can you tell me of a really *good* intelligence office?"

"We live on Peach Street," replied Mrs. Hollis in a tone of settled melancholy; "and we have n't any cook, and I don't know anything about intelligence offices. I never want to. I opened the door of one this morning. I could n't go any further. I *could n't*," added Mrs. Hollis fiercely. "Not if I starved!"

"Dear me!" cried the lady in the green suit, "I 've been to eleven in two days."

"And you have n't got a cook yet?" gasped Mrs. Hollis, for the first time regarding her neighbor with real interest.

"There was n't one to be had in the whole eleven. I could n't make out the reason. There seemed to *be* some reason," pursued the lady thoughtfully. "Everything went well till I mentioned where we lived. Somehow Sweet Home does n't seem to be popular at these places."

"That 's impossible!" answered Mrs. Hol-

lis, stiffening. "You must have had a most exceptional and unfortunate experience. I never knew of anybody anywhere who had any objection to Sweet Home."

She turned coldly to the window, and the new neighbor, abashed and embarrassed, forbore to continue the subject.

When the schoolmaster came home to luncheon that day, he found his wife silent and depressed. She did not touch upon the subject of her morning's experience, but she had no need to do so. He, as well as herself, was growing visibly uneasy, and he observed with a spurious cheerfulness that he hoped she had found a promising woman.

"George," said Mrs. Hollis, reddening like a criminal, "I am a contemptible coward. I did n't get beyond the door. It was enough. George, it was too much to look at them. You never were in such a dreadful place in your life. Some of them I would n't have admitted beyond the back door if they had come begging for a meal. If I gave you the

particulars — but I could n't do it at table. It was really unspeakable. Of course, they were n't all like that; but I did n't see one — not one — to whom I could have given the care of a clean, sweet, decent house. George, I turned and ran."

"You must have had bad luck," replied the schoolmaster soothingly. "That certainly can be no fair specimen."

"I 've no doubt I happened on the lowest place in the city," returned his wife. "It would be quite like me. I 'll spare you the trouble of saying that. Oh, don't give me any advice! If you do I might throw something at you. I feel just like it."

"Why, my *dear* Perley!" replied George Hollis gently.

His wife's sweet sane temper had been the pride of his life and the light of his home. He looked at her in perplexity. He had never seen her like this — irritable, unreasonable, overwrought. Was it to prove a phase of their misfortune that he should have a cross wife?

"You seem to have struck a non-intelligence office," he remarked, with one of those daring attempts to be facetious which may turn the current of a woman's mood any way — and no man can tell beforehand which. Perley might have cried, she might have snarled; instead she smiled, and kissed the schoolmaster.

"I 'm ashamed of myself!" she said heartily. "And I 'll try again."

That very afternoon she took the train to town again, and arrived at a respectable uptown office about half-past three. She found the rooms practically empty. The proprietor was just locking her desk, and informed her customer, without any excessive urbanity of manner, that the office closed at half past three. Everybody knew that, she said.

"I did n't," returned Mrs. Hollis with some spirit. "I never was inside of an intelligence office before."

The proprietor laid down her pen and

looked the lady over. In her weary eyes dawned the spark of a new sensation.

"May I ask how long you have kept house?" she inquired more politely.

"Thirteen years."

"Call in the morning at nine," replied the proprietor, with a scintillation of human interest. "Be on time," she added sharply. "They don't sit in my office twenty minutes before they are picked off."

Annoyed at the tone of the place, Mrs. Hollis was disinclined to obey these peremptory orders. But her good sense prevailed with her, and she appeared a little before the time specified at the intelligence office.

The room was now quite full. The place was freshly swept and washed; the proprietor was well dressed and in good humor. The women who occupied the settees of the waiting-room were palpably of a higher order than those from whom the unaccustomed cook-hunter had fled the day before. The whole character of the office was so

far superior that Mrs. Hollis took heart and hopefully stated her case.

"That 's not a difficult order," said the proprietor good naturedly. "I think I can fill it. Where did you say you lived?"

"In the loveliest suburb outside Boston — Sweet Home."

A change not easy to decipher crossed the proprietor's face, but she made no remark, and proceeded to select several pleasant-looking girls, between whom and herself a private interview succeeded.

Mrs. Hollis felt somewhat surprised to see two or three of these women shake their heads vigorously.

A lady who sat beside her ventured to observe: —

"I see you are a stranger here. I pity you. I have been here thirteen times. I have had three cooks in two weeks. They 're all gone, and I am here again."

"May I ask where you live?" inquired Mrs. Hollis.

"Down by the river in the unfashionable part of Sweet Home."

Mrs. Hollis's reply fell from her lips, for at that moment the proprietor came up with a clean, attractive girl. The young woman was much dressed; in fact, the schoolmaster's wife looked shabby beside her, — a fact which the professional cook did not fail to recognize.

Mrs. Hollis quietly returned the stare of the bold, black eyes that roved over her last year's costume. It was a cold day, and the cook wore a showy imitation sealskin cape, which gave an air of spurious elegance to her figure; its French corset and silk waist were obvious when the cape slid from a pair of stylish shoulders. The interview opened with some awkwardness on the part of Mrs. Hollis, but the woman was superbly at her ease. By a few deft strokes she contrived to reverse their natural positions entirely, and the lady who had come to engage a servant found herself, she could not have

told how, in the position of the person who was to be engaged.

She had ventured to propound a few questions as to the qualifications and character of the candidate, but these were expertly switched off, and she was bewildered to perceive that instead of asking questions she was answering them. In the course of ten minutes it became manifest to her that it was not the cook who was the candidate, but the lady.

"How many did ye say there was in yer family? Three! It might be worse. It's one too many. I always prefer to work for two.

"Any children? How many? One? How old? Thirteen is a bad age. Nobody puts on more airs than the girrl of thirteen. Would she be called Miss? I never Miss 'em before they're eighteen.

"What time do ye be getting breakfast? Half past seven! That's too early. I prefer ladies whose husbands are retired and

don't have to be hurrying breakfast. Do ye expect hot bread for breakfast? I 'm in the habit of giving toast.

"Will the man start me fire for me?

"What 's that? No man? I do be used the furnace man starting me fire. No furnace man? It 's not meself that will be handling a furnace. Your husband makes the furnace fire? I 'm not used to such like families.

"What 's his business? Oh! So ye 're perfessional people. Well, they ain't much on style, but," added the applicant, "they pay their bills, and they do be having position. I don't know but I 'll come.

"How much do ye pay? *Four dollars?* I 'm used to six. What are me privileges? Can I have gentlemen company every evening that I don't go out? Can I go out every evening that I don't have gentlemen company? I want all day Sunday. Can I have every Thursday from one o'clock to half past ten?

"Can I bring me bicycle? I am in the habit of going out on me bicycle every pleasant evening. Can I get out at eight? Will I be expected home before eleven?

"Can I keep the key of the back door in me pocket? How much company do ye have? Will I be expected to wait on the table? Will ye do all the upstairs work yerself?

"Will ye make the light deserts and fancy cooking?

"No sick folks in the house? I don't work where there 's sickness.

"I can't leave me cook-stove to wait on the door. I'm not in the habit of doing general housework. I prefer to be cook in a gentleman's family. Can I have all the cream I want? I'd like to keep the fruit in the kitchen. Me system requires fresh fruit. I'm used to a free hand. I must go to Mass every Sunday. I expect to attend all the services in Lent, and to observe all the Holy Days. I do not like me ladies in the kitchen.

I require them to keep out. Would ye agree not to be meddlin' with me pantry and refrigerator?

"I can't come for four dollars. But ye look to be a lady. If I decide to come, how much *will* ye pay?"

During this broadside Mrs. Hollis had slowly grown paler and stiffer and colder. An ominous fire kindled in her velvet eyes. She rose leisurely to her feet and towered above the woman.

"Pay? I will pay nothing to *you*, nor to anybody like you. I will excuse you from any further conversation with me."

Without further remark, Mrs. Hollis left the intelligence office. The proprietor and the girl stared after her. The lady went down the long stairs with a fine manner, but when she came to the sidewalk, she drew down her veil and cried behind it. With the ebb of her indignation, her courage, too, went out to sea.

She took the first car for the station, and

boarded the train for home. Having done this, her common sense smote her, and she went back uptown again, walking all the way, thereby saving five cents as a penance for her weakness.

With the face of a soldier under shrapnel, she wearily mounted the stairs of another employment office which appeared to be a respectable place. The proprietor of this office, affable and well mannered, recognized the customer as a lady and treated her as such. Having made her wishes known, Mrs. Hollis was told that they could be easily met.

"I have some very nice girls," said the woman enthusiastically. "I can give you a wide choice. I have seven on my list, any one of whom, I think, would suit you."

Mrs. Hollis sat down happily, and looked expectantly around the rooms.

These were filled with women of all ages and conditions, but there might have been among them two dozen who, so far as ap-

pearance and bearing went, could suitably perform domestic duties in a gentleman's home.

Mrs. Hollis felt that she had indeed a wide choice, and had fastened her attention on a pretty German girl with modest mouth and kind, dark eyes, when she observed that the proprietor had come up, and was talking with this very girl. After a few minutes' conversation Mrs. Hollis saw the girl shake her head.

The mistress of the establishment approached another, a tidy Norwegian, who looked capable and healthy. The Norwegian promptly declined. The proprietor addressed a Finn, two Catholics, a North of Ireland Protestant, one American, and a Scotch woman. In every instance she was met by a vigorous negative. Her face flushed, and she came slowly back to her customer.

"I am sorry, madam," she said, "but there seems to be some objection to" —

"How many girls here" — she addressed her constituency in a loud voice — "how many girls would like a very nice place, only three in the family, good pay, good treatment, the best of people, seven miles out?"

"Where is it?" asked two or three voices at once.

"In Sweet Home."

A significant silence replied. The proprietor seemed embarrassed.

"There 's the most unaccountable objection, madam, to your town," she frankly said. "We can't fathom it. We don't know when it began nor how it grew, but there it is. We meet it all the time. We can't explain it or reason with it. It is very annoying."

"Ask them," whispered Mrs. Hollis, "what is the matter with Sweet Home."

The proprietor put the question as requested. The women looked at each other. Some laughed, some blushed, some frowned, many whispered; one — a Catholic — spoke.

"They get run over there on the railroad track. They work 'em so hard that they can't get home from confession in time, so they make 'em come by the track. There was six run over there last year. Four died and two went to the hospital."

Aghast and dumb, Mrs. Hollis turned her back and went to the door for air. The proprietor followed her sympathetically. Mary O'Harrigan, white and bleeding, seemed to jolt by in the ambulance, with her head on the lap of her mistress. Had this preposterous wave grown out of that red ripple? Mrs. Hollis felt the woes of all the households of her afflicted neighborhood upon her innocent shoulders. She saw herself (the hapless instrument of the general misfortune) being driven from town by an exasperated mob. She dared not meet the eye of the proprietor, who followed her soothingly to the stairs.

"I don't wonder you're shocked," said the woman kindly. "It's too ridiculous!

You can no more reason with them than you could with a day nursery full of crying babies. They know, and I know, and everybody knows, that that is n't the *reason*."

"Then what is the reason?" panted Mrs. Hollis.

"Too many young people," said the proprietor. "Too many young married couples. That means too many babies. There are other suburbs where it 's the same way. But this yarn about the railroad has got tacked on to Sweet Home." At this moment a Protestant woman tapped the proprietor on the shoulder.

"Confession is for them as have got things to confess," she said, with a narrow smile. "I don't allow no Catholics to answer for me. That ain't the matter. It 's waitin' on the nurses."

"I don't know but I 'd consider the place," she added grandly. "Will she give five dollars and a half, and put out the washing?"

The proprietor shook her head with an impatience seldom expressed by these women towards the governing class of their customers.

The cook turned away without another look at the lady.

CHAPTER VI

"WITHOUT ENCUMBRANCE"

When Mrs. Hollis returned to her home unaccompanied by any visible cook, Mary Nick met her with a slight smile, which to her employer's growing sensitiveness seemed curious or insolent. But the only thing Mary Nick said was: —

"That red-headed dog has been splashin' up me kitchen, and I've given him a wollopin'. Look at him, now, what he's done to the tail of your dress!"

But Mrs. Hollis, scorning the tail of her dress, put her arms around the red-headed dog and kissed him fervently; in fact, as soon as the two were alone she laid her face on Rugby's neck and cried like a school girl. Unfortunately Mr. Hollis found her in this position and condition when he came

in by the side door too quietly to be heard. She sprang guiltily to her feet, and mopped her eyes with a childish endeavor to conceal the traces of her weakness. Her husband put down his books, and took her in his arms.

"You 're a very tired woman," he said in his kind, quiet way. "And somebody must look after you. Come, tell me all about it."

Against her judgment, against her will, against her predetermination, she spoke — as women do — pouring out the little fret which one has meant to conceal, and should conceal from an overtaxed and too sympathetic man.

"I felt humiliated!" she blazed. "I could n't help feeling humiliated in those offices. No lady could. I 'm not used to such treatment. I suppose it 's going to take time, and more pluck than I seem able to muster. I always thought, before, I was a woman of strength of character."

"That is an impression which I've shared with you," replied her husband.

"Count it among your lost illusions," retorted Perley. "I think I could face a cyclone, or a battleship in action, if I were put to it. I might even kill a snake. I don't know but I could meet a drove of cows. I am conquered by an intelligence office."

She related the story of the morning in detail.

"To-morrow is Saturday," replied the schoolmaster, lifting his head with smouldering eyes. "I won't have my wife treated like this. I'll go in myself. I'll bring out a woman. You may expect one to-morrow afternoon."

To the astonishment of the family, Mr. Hollis was better than his word. He appeared on Saturday noon, gallantly carrying the unsavory bundle of an ill-favored, middle-aged woman, a woman of uncertain nationality, of untidy appearance, of a dark,

experienced eye in which cowered the gleam peculiar to persons who have put themselves temporarily under restraint that they do not purpose or are unable to sustain.

"She 's a rounder," said Mary Nick.

"What is a rounder?" queried Mrs. Hollis with simplicity.

Mary Nick made no reply.

"There!" cried Mr. Hollis. "I told you I'd do it. *I* did n't have any trouble. Why, the women crowded around me until I had to back out of the room in self-defense. I took the first one I saw to get rid of them. They said she was an experienced cook with first-class references."

"Did you see the references?"

"Oh, that took too much time," answered the schoolmaster. "I could n't stop to read them. I took this woman and ran for the train. Seven of them followed us down the stairs, and four or five more called from the landing that they would take the place for less."

Over Mrs. Hollis's puzzled countenance slowly crept the sunrise of illumination.

"George," she said, "they took you for a widower."

"Well," returned Mr. Hollis, unabashed, "what if they did?"

"And you never undeceived them?"

"Her name," replied Mr. Hollis evasively, "is Ellen Something. She 's a widow. At least," he added, "I suppose she 's a widow, for when I put the question twice, to make sure of it, she said: —

"'Sir, I told you before that I was without encumbrance.'"

Mary Nick, having expended some farewell adjectives on the red-headed dog, and having bestowed some secret advice on her successor, departed, with her dollar a day, from the schoolmaster's house. And in her stead, Ellen, without Encumbrance, began to reign.

"Your troubles are over, my dear," smiled Mr. Hollis complacently on Sunday

noon. For the family had sat down to an excellent dinner; and Ellen, who appeared to be of indifferent religious views, had not demanded two hours and a half to attend mass in a drowning rain.

"Perhaps so," mused Mrs. Hollis in a wiry tone which just missed of being shrewish by so narrow a point that her husband regarded her with consternation. "Have you seen her kitchen?" added the lady.

"I did not know that I was expected to oversee the kitchen," replied the gentleman, with some unnecessary dignity.

"Oh, of course," complained his wife, "it all comes on me, and I shall be blamed for the whole disgraceful mess."

Husband and wife averted their eyes from each other with flushed and quivering faces. Hazel stared at her parents.

"Hello, Popper!" shot out the child, "I never saw you and Mommer fight before!"

Mr. Hollis pushed back his plate and his chair. Pleading mutely, his wife raised her

"HELLO, POPPER! I NEVER SAW YOU AND MOMMER FIGHT BEFORE!"

eyes. He disregarded them, took his hat, shut the front door with such self-possession that she would have felt better if he had slammed it, and left the house.

"There, Mommer!" cried Hazel. "You 've done it now."

Humiliated before her child, vexed with her husband, ashamed of herself, Mrs. Hollis locked herself into her own bedroom and spent the afternoon. It grew dark, and her husband did not return. To the fortunate wife this unprecedented procedure had the pangs of desertion. Her heart throbbed till her head beat like an overcharged boiler. Her burning eyes refused to weep. She listened for his footfall till she heard it all the time, and when it really sounded on the front steps she did not distinguish the true sound from the false, and could not go down to meet him. This wounded the husband, and he did not call her, but sat gloomily in the study with Rugby, watching the storm for an occupation. Hazel had gone some-

where with Popsie, and the dismal house was unlighted and silent. Even Ellen could not be heard in her uncleanly kitchen.

Mrs. Hollis sat on in the dark with her face in her hands. True, the cook was a slattern of a dye so dark as had never stained this refined, sweet house. The kitchen, already unspeakable, bade fair to become unbearable. But therefore should one quarrel with one's husband? The pity of it rushed upon the woman's heart in one of those torrents of anguish and protest against ourselves and our fate which weaken us if we are physically strong and kill us if we are weak. She was not used to "having trouble" with George. It seemed to her as if the end of her life had come.

Perley Hollis threw herself flat upon her bed and sobbed — more like a man than a woman — great, racking, fearful sobs. Their echo reverberated down through the register and reached the study where the man sat moping. He bounded up the stairs,

three at a time. She was on her feet in a minute. She ran to meet him (she had on one of her bright, pretty cashmere house gowns, soft blue, this time, in two shades, — she ran with her arms upraised. He folded them around his neck, and then, without warning, he gently pushed her back and flashed a gas-jet full upon her swollen and discolored face.

"Do you think it 's worth while, Perley?" was all the man said.

"Where have you been?" was the woman's reply.

"At the club," returned George Hollis, with a visible reduction of shade in the tenderness of his tone. Now the schoolmaster was not a club man. He had no money and no inclination for this particular method of making a wife miserable. Poverty has its compensations, and Boston clubs were far beyond his means. The only accessible dissipation of this nature was a little association known as the Sweet Home Neighbors. It

possessed two hired rooms and a few magazines, no billiard table, an uncertain janitor, and a fourth-rate brand of cigars. This form of gayety was about as dangerous as a prayer meeting. Mr. Hollis had never found it a maddening temptation, and his wife had not considered it in the light of a rival any more than if it had been the Junior Endeavor.

Yet when he said "I have been at the club," her heart sank with the accumulated and inherited weight which that phrase has carried for generations of married women. She answered a little coldly: —

"I hope you have had a pleasant Sunday afternoon," with a slight reproachful inflection on the word Sunday, and turned away to arrange her disordered hair.

She did not cry any more. Her soft arms had dropped with a certain finality from her husband's neck. Simply observing that she would go and see why Ellen did not announce supper, she went downstairs. George Hollis followed her in silence.

In a few moments Perley could be heard distinctly setting the tea-table herself. She did not tell her husband this time what had happened; she had learned so much wisdom out of one wretched Sunday afternoon.

It was not until the schoolmaster himself pushed the matter that he learned that the cook of his choice was sick abed.

"I'm afraid it's something serious," admitted Mrs. Hollis. "She is in such a heavy stupor. I can't seem to wake her. Had n't we better telephone to the hospital? I don't like her looks at all. Her complexion has a very singular color."

Mr. Hollis climbed the stairs and gingerly looked in at the open door of Ellen's room. When he came down he observed that he did n't wonder she was without encumbrance. He should think she would be. He did not recommend telephoning to the hospital. He thought the police station would be the more suitable number to call up.

"I stuck a hat-pin into her, and she

never squirmed," announced Hazel, noisily tramping downstairs in her turn. "Mommer, you are too innocent for anything. She 's as drunk as a jellyfish."

Hazel's figure of speech was salt of Fairharbor; and her father's attention was diverted to it from the immediate family misfortune. Through forty miles of winter dark and storm, the red revolving Light of the Cape seemed to wink at the suburban. With the idealization that follows sundered relations, he recalled the long, clattering table of his boarding-house.

"We can go to Mrs. Learner's," he suggested dreamily. "And meanwhile, Hazel" —

Meanwhile Hazel had ingeniously vanished.

The rain froze into snow before midnight, and blew into a blizzard before morning. Only the city ploughs could have stormed their way to Mrs. Learner's; and these did not reach Peach Street until noon.

When the snowbound suburbans heard the new cook stirring in the kitchen at a repentant hour, they were so disproportionately grateful that they forbore to dismiss or even to reprimand her. They accepted one of her best breakfasts in a silence which they felt to be pusillanimous and knew to be imprudent; and when the hour of punishment for their weakness came, they recognized its justice and met their fate without whining.

This came, of course, in a manner and at a time when it was least expected and most disastrous. It came, in fact, when the master of the house was not at home to face it.

Estrangement is like a stream whose source, though definite, is so difficult to trace that it is practically unrecorded. Neither George Hollis nor his wife would have distinctly attributed to that stormy Sunday afternoon, when he sat smoking fiercely in the dreary precincts of the Sweet Home Neighbors, and she lay crying on the bed in her own room, the slight, half-con-

scious deviation between them which had its rise on that occasion.

A little manly determination on his part, a little sweet surrender on hers, and that ephemeral disturbance would have been but a shallow pool dried quickly in the sunshine of their strong love. But the magic moment passed. A little soreness in one heart, a little fever in the other grew to discomfort and began to take on the character of positive pain. Neither measured the trickling brook between them which marked the first divergence in their married happiness; it was so small that still

"On either side they walked hand in hand."

When Mr. Hollis announced his intention to go to New York and spend the Christmas holidays, his wife was much disturbed. To many husbands this would have been an unimportant incident; to some wives it would not have mattered. But these two had never acquired the habit of separation which grows so insidiously, and easily encroaches upon the harmony of marriage.

Perley Hollis could not remember when her husband had proposed taking a vacation without her. It had never been his way; they had always been happier to enjoy things together. He did indeed say: —

"I suppose you could n't leave home just now?" politely, and she had replied coldly:

"Of course not! How could we trust Hazel and the house with that drunken woman?" And nothing more had been said about it.

Perley, however, indulged herself in the feminine privilege of telling her mother, who replied in this manner: —

"Your domestic troubles are beginning to tell. George does n't know it, but he wants to get out of the whole thing. Let him come. Don't thwart him. Send him to me, and I will send him back to you in better shape than he left. Give a good husband his rein. He will never take the bits in his mouth. Let him caper a little; he won't break. Turn him loose. He will come

back all the sooner, ask for sugar, and put his head into the bridle again. When a man thinks he is out at pasture you can harness him with the least trouble."

Pondering this advice, Perley adjusted herself to her husband's plans with a submissiveness which, she deluded herself, was of a cheerful, even hilarious aspect. In point of fact, it was so doleful that the schoolmaster, though touched, felt somewhat aggrieved. It occurred to him just in time that he had no business to leave his family at Christmas, and he compromised by spending the day with them, as usual, and starting for New York on the night express. He parted from his wife affectionately, and she did not cry until he had left the house.

Ellen, the bibulous, having achieved a creditable Christmas dinner, could not be denied her evening out. With it she took the key of the kitchen door, and, having received orders to return at ten o'clock, departed from the foreground.

After the schoolmaster had gone, Mrs. Hollis and Hazel paid unusual respect to locks and bolts and keys; fastened everything securely, left the gas in the hall burning, and went to bed. Both were asleep by ten, so that they did not hear Ellen come in.

In the dead of the night Mrs. Hollis was awakened by Hazel pawing her face in a manner which betokened unusual lack of self-possession in that young lady. The girl was in her nightgown, and shivered with cold or fright.

"Mommer, wake up! We are going to be robbed and murdered! There 's a man trying to get into the house!"

At the hoarse whisper Mrs. Hollis sprang. With chattering teeth the two softly raised the window and peered down. The fumes of a species of tobacco which even the lady could recognize as belonging to the deeps below the lowest nicotined society, vitiated the cold air. There, on the front porch,

easily smoking and affably conversing, sat four of the roughest-looking men whose presence had ever blotted the decorum of Peach Street, whether by night or day.

The light of the street lamp directly in front of the house fell full upon the group. In the middle of it, comfortably rocking in the best green piazza chair, sat the new cook. It would be more exact to say hung the new cook, for the woman was too intoxicated to sit up straight. Her gentlemen friends were clearly in the same condition.

Mrs. Hollis looked at her watch. It was two o'clock.

"And she 's got the key of the back door in her pocket," whispered Hazel exultantly, as if she were at a matinée and the play were approaching the fifth act.

While she spoke the words, one of the men took the key from the cook and fumbled with it in the lock of the front door.

"She 's give me the wrong key," said Ellen thickly. "She mint to lock me out

——her! I'll be afther crackin' her skull for it!"

"Maybe this might not be the dooar," suggested one of the men.

At this juncture another of the party observed Mrs. Hollis and Hazel, staring and white-faced, looking down upon them from the open window.

"Begorra, marm," he said, "coom down an' let 's in now, that 's a dear — an' we 'll give ye a sip of the tonic."

"Look a' the goirrl!" cried a maudlin voice. "—— me, there 's a goirrl beyander!"

Hazel dashed the window down.

"Dinnis," muttered one of the earlier speakers, "'t ain't the wrong kay atarl. It 's the wrong dooar, be jabers! Coom wid me till I discover the right dooar."

The party got to their feet with difficulty and reeled away to the back door.

CHAPTER VII

THE ASCENT OF LOTTCHEN

PEACH STREET, totally unguarded at night, when anything might happen, was munificently protected by the city in the daytime, when nothing ever did happen.

"If we can only hold out till six o'clock," chattered Mrs. Hollis, "the officer will be on his beat— Heaven help us, Hazel! They are fitting the key to the back door this minute!"

"They 're too drunk to turn the lock," insisted Hazel. "It 's got that kink to it you have to poke it across lots. Don't be scared, Mommer. *I 'll* take care of you."

But Mrs. Hollis, too terrified to raise a smile at Hazel's magnificent manner, replied only by crawling to all the bedroom doors — there were three — which she locked and

bolted with shaking fingers. Hazel watched these preparations for a siege with wild, excited, snapping young eyes. The girl of the period felt that the opportunity of her life had come. It was now clearly her duty to take command of her mother. She began to get into some clothes — the first things she could lay her hands on. These proved to be some of her father's underwear, covered by Mrs. Hollis's Christmas dinner dress and surmounted by a red blanket.

"Mommer," she said abruptly, "open the door into the hall, and let me out. Bolt me out and bolt yourself in tight. I 'm going to sneak out the front door while they 're ramming away at the other. I 'll be back before you could eat a caramel. Here 's one on the mantelpiece! Chew away on it till you hear me coming."

"You must not go one step," faltered the mother. "You will be murdered on the way. Where are you going, anyhow?"

"Oh! only to the Police Station," answered Hazel lazily.

"I forbid it! I refuse permission! You shall not go!" cried the mother.

But the daughter, to whom "shall" and "must" were obsolescent (not to say obsolete) words, quietly drew the bolts and went out of the room.

"Then I am going too!" announced Mrs. Hollis.

"You 're in your nightgown," whispered Hazel, "and you 'd faint on the way — slap in the snow. That would be a nice mess. Bolt yourself in, I tell you, Mommer, and I 'll take care of you!"

She snatched her father's golf cap from the hat-tree as she crawled downstairs, and let herself out of the front door without a sound.

. . . . . .

The lieutenant was snoring a little with his head on his desk when a click at the great iron door aroused his experienced consciousness. He sprang, and stood confounded. The station clock pointed to five minutes after three. Standing composedly

before him appeared an extraordinary figure clad in a trailing brown silk dress (which was open at the throat over a man's undervest), smothered in a red bedblanket, and surmounted with a golf cap. Hazel's long hair fell beneath the cap. Brown fire and red fire blazed in her eyes and cheeks. Jove! What a pretty lunatic! The officer felt for his handcuffs.

"Bring 'em along," said Hazel serenely. "You 'll need five pairs. We 've got high jinks up at our house. Hurry up, now, for I 've got to get back and take care of my mother!"

. . . . . .

Mrs. Hollis lay on the floor. This dreadful affair seemed easier to bear on something hard than on anything soft. Tossed between terror and self-reproach, she listened for her daughter until her head reeled. She was as drunk with fear as the marauders below with "tonic." Would George ever forgive her? Could she ever

forgive herself? How could she have allowed Hazel to go? How could she have prevented her? The mother of the period in that twenty-minute space of anguish perceived that the power which would have kept Hazel where she was told to stay should have begun about thirteen years ago — and had not.

How long had she lain there listening? It might have been hours. She grew confused, and could not have told.

The orgy at the back door had unaccountably ceased. Had the party perceived the child and followed her? Mrs. Hollis remembered Hazel's advice about the caramel, and, with the instinct of an obedient mother, considered whether she should follow it.

"Hello, Mommer!"

A clear young voice pealed on the cold, dark morning air. "Here I am! I'll be there before you can squash a peppermint. I said I'd take care of you! We've got

JOVE! WHAT A PRETTY LUNATIC!

handcuffs on the whole five of 'em. They were dead drunk on the kitchen floor. Ellen was across the stove — I wish the fire had n't been out. Put your clothes on, Mommer, for there 's a policeman coming along upstairs with me. I brought three of 'em, so there 's one to spare for you.

"This is too jolly for anything!" added Hazel. "I never had such a good time in all my life."

She admitted the Peach Street officer to her mother's presence with her dancing-class bow. The trail of her mother's brown silk, splashed and muddy, hung across her arm. The lace ruffle of her dainty nightdress showed above her father's undervest. The red blanket gave her the cut of a handsome squaw, and the golf cap sat jauntily on the side of her falling hair.

"Madam," said the officer with gravity, "I congratulate you on having the pluckiest girl in this city." The officer wanted to add, "and the prettiest." But he forbore,

for he had the wisdom of his species. He hurried away to carry his prize to the patrol wagon. The Sweet Home Station, which had not received so many involuntary visitors for a year and a half, modestly bore the honors which the Peach Street officer laid at its feet.

Before the next night Old Nick was engaged to sleep in the Hollis house and protect the family until the master should return. This established a precedent; and a precedent is as inexorable in domestic as in civic law.

When the shock of this dramatic event had somewhat subsided, Mrs. Hollis wrote a telegram to her husband explaining the circumstances. On further thought she tore it up, and related them in a letter to her mother, who replied by special delivery: —

"Misfortune is like milk. Spill it, and you make a mess of it. Carry it steadily, drink it slowly, and you will find it contains fifty per cent of nourishment. I have not read

your letter to George. If you are neither of you hurt, I don't think, if I were you, I would hurry him home. He is a pretty hard-worked man, and more tired than I ever saw him before. Is it best to spoil his vacation by saying anything about this shocking thing till he gets home? Of course I will do as you say." . . .

The subtleties of unreason are too fine for the rougher imaginations of the reasonable to follow, and in a different state of mind and body Mrs. Hollis could not have been wounded by her mother's letter. Tired, worried, worn, and lonely, she read it through an erring lens. She felt unaccountably wronged by it. Her first purpose to answer it as she felt gave place to a determination not to answer it at all. Any overworked and unhappy woman will understand (no other being could) how Perley conceived the idea that she had lost the sympathies of both her husband and her mother. She clasped the sick delusion to an

aching heart, and drearily began to ascend the mountain of housework which the arrest of Ellen had piled sky-high.

Hazel, with an amiable and agile intent, climbed with her mother as long as she found it interesting; then lost footing, and fell flat into a toboggan party with Popsie. Mrs. Hollis diversified the round of baking, sweeping, and dishwashing by occasional forays into town. In none of these did she capture a cook. Three women, indeed, agreed to come out and see how they liked it. Two of these did not suggest an appearance; and Mrs. Hollis, who for so many years had, with some delicacy of feeling, averted her face from the mortification of her neighbors when publicly deserted by city servants whom they had come to the station to meet, found herself in the position which it had never occurred to her as possible that she could fill, and noticed, with burning cheeks, that one or two Omniscient Suburbans, earnestly engaged by the train

schedules on the walls of the station, were too much engrossed to observe her own too evident plight. The third candidate came out in a blizzard at the time specified, took one look at the robust plough breaking out the streets of Sweet Home, said she did n't think she should like it, and swung herself aboard the return train, which coughed its way into the station as the other sneezed out.

When the schoolmaster came back from New York, he found his wife on her knees scrubbing the front vestibule. He had come unexpectedly, thinking to surprise and please her. Soothed by the tact and charm of his mother-in-law, eased by her luxurious home, rested by his unexampled vacation, the fretted man had regained his dreamy, peaceful identity. He longed for his own books, his child's nonsense, the arms of his wife. He hurried up the walk with shining face. The accumulated constraint of weeks still prevented the little greeting whistle which was

dearer to his wife than he would ever know, or than any man could understand.

Perley dropped her scrubbing brush and leaped to her feet. The skirt of her cotton dress was pinned up and back about her waist. Her hair was disordered. Her sleeves were rolled to her elbows, and her dripping hands instinctively sought the drying capacity of her apron. He remembered that he had noticed washerwomen do the same thing. She lifted to him a countenance wrinkled with worry.

He caught her to his heart with a low, passionate exclamation, and she would have scrubbed the whole house and a dozen like it for that moment's precious span.

"You never told me!" he murmured, with rising tenderness. "You never wrote to me at all!"

"I did n't mean to," said Perley. He pushed back her face and scanned it gravely. Something in her tone had swerved the current of his feeling.

"I should have spoiled it all — your vacation, I mean," she hastened to explain. "Besides, Mother advised me not to."

"Your mother advised you not to write to me?"

"Well — not exactly — not precisely that. I wrote her what happened, and she thought she 'd better not show you the letter. Then Hazel and I had to go to court to testify — and I knew you would n't like that — and I was a good deal upset by the fright, and the whole thing — and so — George, you 've knocked over the floor pail, and we 're both of us up to our knees in muddy water! Get right out of it and change your feet!"

The schoolmaster and the pail vigorously parted company, and the vestibule echoed with some secular remarks which would have interested the high school. In silence the principal took his wife in his arms, all dripping as she was, and, as if she had been an invalid, or even a bride, carried her upstairs to their own room. Still without a

word he pulled off her slippers and stockings, and tenderly bathed and dried her feet, tore off her wet dress, and put his overcoat around her, then bundled her in a red eiderdown puff, took the conglomerate result into his lap, and sat down with it before the register. With reverence he took her parboiled hands into his, and lifted them slowly to his lips.

"Now," he demanded, with a passionate authority, "tell me the whole story. Do you suppose I 'd have stayed away one day if I had known?"

"But you could go away," said Perley weakly. As soon as the words had escaped she would have given him a wife's wildest kiss to recapture them. Born of dumb bitterness, sprung from sheer nervousness, they had taken wing into the awful freedom that fate reserves for the trifles which bless or curse our lives. The clasp of the man's arms loosened a little about the eiderdown puff.

"If you think you could be comfortable in the easy chair," he said politely, "I believe I 'll change my wet stockings."

. . . . . .

"THE DOMESTIC PROBLEM SOLVED HERE"

The rooms were full, and the manager was so happy that she was more than good-natured. The originality that had led her to select for her office the ingenious title by which it was now well known had developed in all branches of her business, and The Domestic Problem Solved was a cheerful success.

One day in early January a brown-haired lady in a brown cloth suit, with brown eyes to match, presented herself at the establishment which bore this extraordinary name. Nobody paid any particular attention to her, and she looked leisurely about her. She found herself in a large, light room covered with a tapestry carpet, punctuated sparsely with plush furniture, and decorated with a

single photograph, large in size and pronounced in character. This was a copy of Millet's Noon, a picture less well known than many by this artist, and portraying the figure of a peasant woman, worked to utter exhaustion, fallen on the grass, with her face buried in her nerveless arms.

The lady in the brown suit stood for a time unnoticed in the crowded room. She soon perceived that other ladies were standing in groups before a desk behind which the manager, brisk and bright, received their applications.

The lady in the brown suit observed the eyes of several of the women who were presumably candidates for domestic situations, wandering to the Millet peasant on the wall.

"That's how they do it," said a two-hundred-pound Canadian, pointing to the picture. "I was that way mostly at my last situation — worked to skin and bone. I mean to take it easy this time."

The lady with the brown eyes came on to

the manager's desk. She was politely received — the manners of the manager were unexceptionable — and requested to explain her wishes as briefly as possible.

"Our women do not like to be kept waiting," said the manager. "Their time is valuable" —

"And the ladies?" queried she of the brown eyes. "What about our time?"

"A lady belongs to the leisure classes," was the swift reply. "Your wishes, please?"

Mrs. Hollis defined them. The brows of the manager contracted a little.

"The general housework girl, madam, is out of date," she answered promptly. "She will soon be an extinct variety. But I will see what I can do for you. Your name?"

"Mrs. George Hollis."

"Residence?"

"Sweet Home."

"I 'm sorry for you," observed the manager, laying down her pencil. "Street?"

"Peach Street."

"Too far out. Age?"

"Excuse me!" stammered the lady.

"Good health?" proceeded the manager. "Sweet temper? Good disposition? How many children? How much company? Do the outing shirts go out? How large a wash? How many evenings out do you take a week? How many afternoons?"

"I do not think I understand," began Mrs. Hollis. But the manager of the Domestic Problem Solved went on firmly: —

"How long have you been without a girl? Why did the last one leave you? How many have you had this winter? What are your qualifications to fill the position of employer? What are your references, please?"

"My what? I lost the word."

"Your references. We do not place ladies on our lists without references."

Mrs. Hollis turned, and was about to leave the place without trusting herself to reply, when the pungent memory of her

emergency smote her like uncorked ammonia, and she contrived to control herself so far as to answer calmly: —

"My husband is a professional man — a teacher."

"Ah! That is promising. A college professor, perhaps? The title goes a great way with our clients. Not a professor? That 's a pity. I could have given you quite a wide choice," complained the manager.

"Mr. Hollis is principal of the high school of our city," observed the lady, not without some rising altitude of manner, which the woman of business was swift to perceive.

"For people of position," she hastened to say suavely, "some of our difficulties are removed, provided," she added, "that the style of living corresponds. What is your style of living? Do you have Wilton carpets? How much did you give for your lace curtains? A good deal of bric-à-brac? Portières? Chandeliers? That kind of thing?"

"I have not a lace curtain in my house," replied Mrs. Hollis, "and our carpets are straw or ingrain. We have no bric-à-brac to speak of, and no portières or chandeliers, whether you spoke of them or not."

The manager shook her head doubtfully, but hurried on to say: —

"Perhaps your domestic references may compensate. What are your domestic references?"

"I am very dull; I fail to follow you."

"I mean what references have you from previous employees? We find these very valuable. They outweigh everything else."

"It seems to me," said the customer, with unsmiling dignity, "that we have neither of us the time for this kind of farce."

"But I am quite in earnest," urged the manager of the Domestic Problem Solved, with evident sincerity. "You are not up to the new methods. You are behind the times. This office keeps abreast of them. Have you nothing at all? Is there no cook

or second girl to whom you could refer me?"

"There is the wife of a plumber who used to live in the city of Boston," admitted Mrs. Hollis, who was now inclined to make the best of the joke. "He has started a branch business in New York," continued the Bostonian. "I think she would give me a reference if I asked her for one."

"Name?"

"Mrs. John Donahue."

"Ah! The well-known firm of Donahue and Connelly? Excellent! Nothing could be better. I will consult her at once. How long was she with you?"

"Thirteen years."

"No further reference is necessary, madam," returned the manager unexpectedly. "We should call this A No. 1 — Ladies," she said loudly, addressing the women who sat in the plush chairs, "here is a person whose last cook stayed with her thirteen years. How many of you would like the place?"

Fourteen women rose. The big Canadian was at their head. The customer, flushed with her momentary success, indicated by a motion of her eyelids that she declined the services of the Canadian.

"Your Millet has made a revolutionist of her," she said. "Give me that German girl with the soft eyes."

"Miss Lottchen?" called the manager deferentially.

The German girl came modestly forward.

"Will you come and work for me, my dear?" asked Mrs. Hollis. "I will treat you kindly and pay you well. And I've nothing more to say. You can come or not, as you please."

"I see you when you just come in, ma'am," answered Lottchen prettily. "In all my travelin' an' workin' I never see a lady so nice like you. You look so kind as my own mudder. I will work for you."

CHAPTER VIII

HER ABDICATION, WITH CONSEQUENCES

GERMANY, whatever may be said of its ideals of womanhood, knows how to create home-makers, and teaches her women to respect that station of life into which it has pleased God (and man) to call them.

Lottchen proved too good to be true. She ascended the dais sweetly, took the empty throne strongly, and held it royally. She had some of the fine, old-fashioned qualities of Mary the First, added to the best of her own nationality, and she restored to the souls of our friends their perishing faith in the practicability of home service. For their adventures had superinduced in them the philosophy to which our common experience is rapidly pushing us all. They had begun to perceive that the very existence of our homes

is threatened by the anarchy which has reached the imagination and is controlling the conduct of the domestic workwoman. Up to the present time the revolution occupies the woman. It has not yet befuddled the clearer business head of the domestic workman.

Lottchen respected herself, her vocation, and her employers, and she bestowed, and therefore received, proportional happiness.

Peace descended upon the troubled house into which unexpected good luck had directed her. The tangle disappeared from the brows of the schoolmaster, and collapsing hope revived in the heart of his wearied and worried wife.

The slight divergence between the two, which had developed they could not have said how, had begun to converge slowly in the best and surest of all ways, — by not thinking about it. For some weeks, in fact, Mrs. Hollis thought as little as possible on any subject. She found herself more

seriously spent than she had supposed, and the most important consequence of the constraint which had formed between herself and her husband was that she did not tell him how exhausted she was. Every day found her for hours motionless upon her bed, eyes closed, arms hanging, devitalized nerves crying for their lost life, — all overworked women know how. She soon became, however, cheerfully conscious of regaining herself, and had gone so far as to promise Mrs. Voisin to try next Friday and hear the paper on the Australian ballot at the Omniscient Suburbans. (For her prolonged absence from this exacting organization had begun to excite that amount of remark which verges on scandal.) She had reached this point of physical and mental revival when Hazel blew into the study one day with fate upon her face.

"Popper! You go tell Mommer — for somebody 's got to. Lottchen's mother 's gone up a spout."

"Dead?" asked the schoolmaster feebly. His newspaper dropped from his hands.

"No such luck," returned Hazel, with the cheerful heartlessness of her age. "She 's had to go and fall down some old stone steps and get smashed up. She 's broken her neck or her head or her thigh or something. Lottchen 's going. She 's going to sail straight for Berlin, slap off — next Saturday. She 'll land there in a week."

"If you consulted your geography occasionally," sighed the principal, "you might learn, after some assiduous application, that no line of steamers sails direct for Berlin. But I don't know that you would, — even then."

The loss of Lottchen seemed to him, for the moment, a small matter compared with the brilliant ignorance of his daughter. But the time came when it occurred to him that he was not so sure. Might it be easier, on the whole, to have any kind of a daughter than no kind of a cook?

The blow fell from the shining heavens. Lottchen was a mother-girl, and the passion of the mother-girl surpasses the passions of love, of jealousy, of restlessness, — surmounts all the great human emotions which separate mistress and maid. Lottchen wept — but went.

She wrote a few weeks later that her mudder was gecripplet for her live.

"She did gry, 'Meine tochter! Meine tochter!' and did like to die for joy when I geknocket on der door. In all my travelin' and workin' I never see eine lady so kind like you. But I can go no more besailin' and betravelin' from my mudder."

Mrs. Hollis bore this fresh bereavement with unexpected composure. When the news was mercifully broken to her there fell a few grave and silent moments. Then she puzzled her family by a vigorous peal of laughter.

"George," she said, "this has ceased to be dreadful. It has become ridiculous."

In this cheerful condition of mind she resumed the quickstep of life again, prepared to dance through the employment offices with a brave and steady foot.

She came home from her first day's renewal of this too familiar occupation with the old clinched and knotted nerve, but her cheeks were almost too bright, and her eyes had a fictitiously merry swing, like Chinese lanterns hung out to give to a dark night the air of a festal occasion which did not exist.

"George," she began, "I 've struck a new amusement. They call it the Sociological Bureau. It is a corporation. It is founded by progressive people who propose to meet the demands of the age. It is quite advanced" —

"Did you get a girl?" interrupted the schoolmaster.

"I 'm coming to that. I want to tell you about this funny place. They convinced me in a few minutes that only an effete aristo-

crat would tamper with the intelligence offices, and that all the regular philanthropic and business agencies for the supply of domestic service — all the old steady things that most people trust to — were the relics of a black and barbarous age. To this organization alone generations to come should hereafter turn for dinners and breakfasts. Luncheons I don't think were mentioned. I made out that the cook of the future would be expected to supply but two meals a day, with the privilege of reducing these to one if she asked it. Her wages are to be regulated by a vast association to be known as the Culinary Ladies' Union. You pay, or you starve. Her hours out" —

"But about a girl?"

"I 'll get to that in a minute. Her hours of absence from her post are to be dictated by herself. The theory is that she should be relieved from duty every afternoon at — two, I think. Perhaps it was half-past one. If you want any incidental service after that

— such as a meal, for instance, or some one to stay with a baby or a sick person — you hire it from outside. You hire everything from outside, I understand, that she declines to do. You will see at once, in the country and in isolated places, the immense convenience of such an arrangement."

"But did you hire a servant?"

"You poor benighted fellow! There is no such substantive as servant left in the English language. A servant is as extinct as a dodo. For sufficient consideration, a few ladies will stoop to assist you. If not very advanced they will consent to be known as helpers, secretaries, companions, and the like. The choice term is companion. You are expected to supply them with bicycles."

"Supply them with what?"

"Bicycles, George, bicycles! Can you spare yours? Or could you induce Hazel? — I don't see how we could buy a new one, just now. (It cost so much to refurnish Edda's room after that fumigation.) Oh, —

I forgot — and pianos. They are to have a piano, George. And a parlor. The elementary condition is a front bedroom. I suppose we could give up ours and turn into the hall chamber."

"I am reminded," observed the schoolmaster grimly, "of Mark Twain's invitation to his burglars to spend a month in the spare room. But as to a girl?"

"Wait till I tell you some more about the modern improvements in domestic service. The most delicious is the new rule about references. Have n't you read about it? They said it had been in the New York papers — but I have n't read the paper for so long. You see, you give them a reference when they have been in your house a month. This is fundamental. They are archangels till they get their reference. Then they act like the other thing if they want to — and go — for they 've got you. If you decline to sign the new reference you are actuated by some petty pique or injustice. So you sign the reference."

"I think I see myself!" muttered the schoolmaster between his teeth. "But I insist — what kind of a girl does the Sociological Bureau produce?"

"Well," admitted his wife timidly, "you'll soon find out. I've engaged one. She's coming to-morrow."

"She is, is she? . . . Does she sit at table, and do I wait on her?"

"Well — she consented to wait on table. But she's never done it before. She feels it keenly. She's seen better days."

"The deuce she has! — What can she do?"

"You see, she can't wash," proceeded Mrs. Hollis. "We've got to hire Mary Nick to wash. And it hurts her back to iron. I said I'd help her about that. But she is an accomplished housekeeper — don't forget now, and call 'the girl,' for she won't stay if you do. Her references say she is an accomplished housekeeper, and too neat for a better world. She thinks she can re-

call her knowledge of cooking after a while. You see, she used to drive her own ponies. There was a span — both blooded horses — and her coachman used to " —

" Perley," interrupted Mr. Hollis solemnly, " would you feel at all hurt if I asked an alienist to call — quite incidentally — and cast an eye on you? "

Perley rippled into ringing laughter.

" Oh, and I forgot to say she expects to use the parlor and requires to be introduced to our guests. And we 're to pay her fares to town whenever she goes in. And you 're to make her kitchen fire for her every morning. And she "—

The schoolmaster put his hands to his head with a groan which went to his wife's heart. She forbore, and spared him. Both were tired out with the mental shocks induced by the Sociological Bureau, and they went anxiously and aimlessly to bed at an early hour.

About midnight, Perley, being still unable

to sleep, and having held her breath a good while to avoid waking her husband, discovered that he was making similar heroic efforts to prevent arousing her. She put out her hand as gently as a blossom stirring in the wind upon its stem. He turned and spoke. He was startled to find that she was laughing violently, with her face smothered beneath the bedclothes. Was Perley going to become hysterical on top of everything else?

"George," she gasped, "I didn't tell you — we are to call her Miss. Her name is Miss Highwater. It 's out of date to call them by their Christian names."

"Never mind, dear," urged the husband in an empty voice, "we 've got each other."

"Oh, and George — I didn't *dare* to tell you. She used to own a steam yacht."

CHAPTER IX

MISS HIGHWATER: AND HAZEL BLOSSOMS

Miss Highwater arrived with punctilious promptness, and in a snowstorm. She did not walk, and one would hardly say she got out of her cab. She was one of the persons of whom it might be natural to observe that she alighted from a carriage. She was a very good-looking woman, in the prime of life. If not precisely the lady, she had an insistent gentility, if one chose to classify her in the obsolescent word.

Rugby ran out to meet her, showing all his teeth. She wore a dark flannel street dress, which Rugby seized by the hem and chewed at violently. Then he drew off, planting his forepaws in the snow, and proceeded to shake the wearer energetically. Miss Highwater spun around like a tall top

under the powerful jerks and twists of the setter. An authoritative command from the house led Rugby to exchange these hostilities for equally violent caresses which punctuated Miss Highwater's dress with muddy footmarks at picturesque intervals.

"She has an amiable expression," said Mr. Hollis, looking over his wife's shoulder at the stranger.

"Oh!" replied Perley. "This is one of Rugby's days. That dog has times when he would endanger the soul of an archangel."

"At what age," inquired Mr. Hollis, "did this lady profess to have arrived?"

"She said she was forty."

"So? I've no doubt that is true. Add ten years, and I think it would be equally true."

Mrs. Hollis hurried down the wet steps with profuse, not to say abject, apologies for Rugby's misdemeanor.

"You must forgive the poor fellow. He does n't often do this; and he is so old, and

we love him so much that we have given up whipping him. I don't think it will ever happen again. I hope," she added timidly, "that you are fond of dogs?"

"They are not usual," replied Miss Highwater severely.

In spite of this unlucky introduction Miss Highwater condescended to sit down and converse pleasantly with her employer. Mrs. Hollis felt as if she were entertaining a visitor, and introduced a series of vague and safe social topics, none of which verged on the domestic career. At last she managed to suggest that the housekeeper might like to go up to her room. It was with positive embarrassment that the lady intimated that they lunched at half past twelve. It seemed to her as if she were expected to go out and get the meal and call Miss Highwater down when it was ready. She mustered courage, however, to imply that they were very prompt, as Mr. Hollis must meet important engagements.

When Miss Highwater came downstairs, she inspected the kitchen with a remote eye, and said there was something the matter with the fire, but that she would do the best she could. At twenty minutes past one Mrs. Hollis brought her husband a sandwich and a glass of milk. Nothing was cooked, and with this promising beginning the hungry student went to his afternoon's work at a philanthropic committee meeting which was involved in chronic civil war.

Dinner was late also — three quarters of an hour late. Miss Highwater said it was the draught. Breakfast was later — an hour and a half. Miss Highwater said it was the stove. Dinner the next day was only half an hour over due. This Miss Highwater attributed to the coal.

"The tide is coming," observed the schoolmaster. He began to whistle a bar from a song that he and Perley liked, —

> "The awful tide is rising,
> Rising for you and me!"

"She 's sure she 'll recall her knowledge of cooking after a while," pleaded Mrs. Hollis the next morning, when her husband thrust back his untasted breakfast. "You see, she was used to doing things in her father's home, and with the servants" —

"Have I complained?" interrupted the schoolmaster frigidly. Already thin ice was forming again between the husband and the wife.

After a few desperate days in which the starving family, with nerves wincing from every trifle, were shocked to find themselves in one of those thickets of irritability in which worry and hunger may entangle saints and heroes, — after this, the character of the cooking suddenly improved. Mr. Hollis, who had dined out for several nights (an unprecedented dissipation on the part of the schoolmaster) pronounced the next breakfast excellent, and went astray no more. This continued for ten days. Mrs. Hollis, whose face had grown long and gray, found herself

too ill to leave her room one day, and then the truth came out. Perley herself had done the housekeeper's cooking, had taken the consequences, and held her peace.

The master of the house, with some nebulous idea of addressing a few remarks to Miss Highwater, took one snap-shot look at the kitchen. There he found, not what one could call dirt, but highly developed disorder, — the havoc of inexperience, the chaos of incompetence. He shut the door and ran for the next train to town, where he lunched and dined at a fifteen-cent spa; while his wife bore her blind headache in the solitude that sick men do not know.

Miss Highwater seemed very much grieved at this state of things, and, to do her justice, tried hard, in a resigned and ladylike way, to improve upon her deficiencies.

"She says," cried Hazel, storming in, "that she *told* you she was only a plain cook. She says her idea of plain cooking is to boil the potatoes and peel 'em and set 'em on the table."

"I wonder if she was fed that way on her steam yacht?" put in the schoolmaster maliciously.

"Don't be too hard on her," sighed his wife. "She 's seen so many better days and so many kinds of them. At least, George, you will grant that she is a very ladylike person."

At this moment Hazel bounced in again. "Mommer, she says you asked her if she could cook, and she says she *can* cook. But she says she never told you that she could run around like a damn antelope."

One evening, when Miss Highwater had honored the house with her ministrations for about three weeks, it chanced that the schoolmaster puffed up courage once more to invite some distinguished gentlemen to dine: a college president, and the eminent English author who was taking his first lecturing tour through America that season. Mrs. Hollis had personally conducted the dinner; and thoroughly exemplified at the head of

her own table the dictum of the famous foreigner who said that in America the first dish which was served at dinner was roast mistress of the house. Perley's cheeks were crimson lamps; her eyes wore a glittering enamel; her brow was damp and brooding. Her usually brilliant conversation was dulled with the exquisite anxieties known only to the woman who presides over the refined home in which she has neither the income nor the opportunities to retain trained service.

Poor Perley's interest in German literature waned when the soup entered, served in a pudding dish, and with teaspoons; and her comprehension of English politics reeled under the appearance of a lukewarm salad, and of empty finger-bowls. After dinner, however, she revived a little, and was vivaciously entertaining the Englishman, when the doorbell rang with a masterful hand. Miss Highwater, in a surah silk dress, answered the bell with unusual promptness,

and after a momentary delay ushered the caller into the parlor. Mrs. Hollis turned from her Englishman and rose to receive the stranger.

"It's my gentleman friend," said Miss Highwater distinctly. "This is Mr. Bunny, Mrs. Hollis. We won't incommode you any. He 's come to practice our duet. We sing in the same choir. But we won't be at all in your way. I hope you 'll go right on talking, and not mind us."

With this she seated herself at the piano, and Mr. Bunny, unfolding an ominous roll of music, stationed himself behind her, and cleared his throat for action.

The Englishman instinctively felt for the note-book which he recalled himself from producing. "How very curious and interesting," he said. "I suppose this is one of the habits and customs of your people?"

Poor Mrs. Hollis carmined like a jacqueminot and then pearled like a day lily. But the American college president looked at

Mr. Hollis and began to laugh. That laugh saved the occasion, and the schoolmaster rose to the hint.

"Lest the farce be incomplete," he suggested pleasantly, "I move that we ourselves adjourn to the dining-room."

This, host, hostess, and guests proceeded to do; and there the conversation swerved from literature and politics, and concentrated upon the subject of domestic service. This topic, by all the canons forbidden to the drawing-room, seemed somehow to become, in the dining-room, altogether regular.

"We ought to go into the kitchen," suggested the college president, "and toast our feet in the oven." But the Englishman stared.

Meanwhile the voices of Miss Highwater and Mr. Bunny soared to the ceiling in mutual ecstasy. As a musical entertainment the performance was variegated by Rugby, who brought the yellow sofa pillow into the hall, sat down hard on it before the parlor

door, and kept a constabulary eye on the performers, growling with wrinkled upper lip at all Miss Highwater's solos, and howling to high Heaven when Mr. Bunny carried the tenor.

"I think we may say," observed Mr. Hollis to his wife, when they found themselves alone together that night, — "I believe we may say that we have reached the Highwater mark. Will you intimate as much to her, or shall I? I think," he added, "I should enjoy doing it."

When Mary Nick entered the house to get dinner a week after this occasion, she found Miss Highwater gloomily ascending the steps of her cab, very much assisted from behind by Rugby.

"You poor child!" So began the next letter from New York. Mrs. Hollis opened it languidly. She was still in that pitiful stage in a woman's life when she feels that even her mother no longer understands her. "Not

for the world," proceeded the writer, "would I call your misfortunes your faults. That is a form of cruelty which the anti-vivisectionists have omitted to notice. But I must say that I think you have contrived to strike all the crank agencies and offices in Boston, and as a New Yorker I may be permitted to observe that this is saying a good deal. Why don't you try some of the steadfast things, like the Young Women's Christian Association? or Miss Duke's? or Mrs. — I forget her name. And I thought there were some places on Boylston Street that could be trusted; and a thoroughly respectable one on Winter; and some others that really do their best with such material as they can command. Put on your rubbers and try again!"

But poor Perley could not put on her rubbers, and was quite past trying again. She, who had scorned Americanitis, and scoffed at nervous prostration, as ignorance scoffs at hysteria, and as the fool in his heart derides

insomnia, found herself now too weak to leave Sweet Home.

"I will answer some advertisements," she said patiently. "I have still strength enough for that."

Within the span of a week she replied by letter to sixteen domestic advertisements. From these she received but two answers. One said, in three commanding lines, that the writer could consider nothing but a Back Bay flat. The other stipulated peremptorily that the advertiser must be made one of the family.

"Why," urged Mrs. Hollis hopefully, "we always make them one of the family, don't we?"

"Mommer," scornfully interpolated Hazel, "you are too innocent to be out of the nursery. She means she wants to sit at table with us, and bounce in and out with dishes and things, and hop round to bring the dessert. If you were n't such a *shorn* lamb," added Hazel, with the naïve uncon-

sciousness of disrespect characteristic of the new daughter, "you would advertise yourself. Let *me* write the advertisement," begged Hazel. "Would n't I write a smasher! *I'd* get you a girl."

"Write it if you want to," moaned her mother indifferently. "I don't care. Your father and I have done our best. You could n't do worse. But be sure and show it to somebody."

Hazel made no reply. She meant to do as she saw fit on that point. But it was hardly worth while to say so.

In the next Saturday evening's "Transcript" and the next Sunday morning's "Herald," the column "Help Wanted" was headed in the following unexpected manner: —

WANTED. — A good girl in a good home for good pay. She has got to cook decently and behave herself. Nobody need apply who puts on airs. This is a gentleman's

family, and we know a good girl when we see one. She 's got to be clean. Only three in the family, and no children ; only one grown-up young lady. Our last girl was with us thirteen years. This vacancy was caused by her getting married. Apply to the Principal of the High School, Sweet Home, Massachusetts.

P. S. We 'll consider a working-housekeeper if she can keep house, or work, either. And she can have a fire in her room.

What took place between Hazel and her father, when this advertisement met his eye, was not overheard by human ears. The main features of the interview were repeated when the bill for this masterpiece of advertising reached Mr. Hollis's desk.

When the family storm aroused by this incident had slightly subsided, the astonished mother of this astonishing daughter put the following questions : —

"What in the name of reason possessed you, Hazel?"

"I went up a spout, that's all," returned Hazel. "I could n't stand it any longer. Somebody 's got to do something."

"But what could have induced you to put in that about a fire in her room? There is n't any chance for it."

"Because there ought to be," retorted Hazel. "Miss Highwater said she was cold. She said it made her nose blue. I don't see why they should be shoved up there in the attic. I don't see why they are n't just as cold as we are."

This was a new view of an old problem, and Mrs. Hollis, moodily considering it, struggled up from her invalid lounge two flights into the attic and inspected the quarters which Miss Highwater and her predecessors had inhabited. The room was well carpeted, and sufficiently furnished. It had a comfortable bed and plenty of bedclothes. At this point its attractive qualities stopped.

The ceiling sloped, the windows narrowed, and there was no paper on the walls. The chairs were hard. The kerosene lamp was unshaded. There were no pictures, books, or ornaments, and the windows were curtained with the thick white plush of a mid-winter's frost. The room was certainly cold, and it could not be warmed. It did not seem alluring on the whole, and the mistress of the house went downstairs thoughtfully.

That night she said to her husband : "I don't know but that the child 's right after all. I might have gone on forever and not noticed it."

The schoolmaster laid down an article on pedagogics with an expression in which the dream in his eyes and the knot in his brows contended for conquest.

"If you could possibly enlighten me a little as to the nature of the subject on which you are conversing," he began, with that excess of politeness which sometimes made his wife wish he would scold instead.

She hastened to add: "I was thinking about a fire in that attic. We have gone on putting them there just because we always put Mary there. I suppose I could move the next one downstairs and give up my sewing-room. I am afraid we have not thought enough about some of these things. Don't you think there might be something on the other side of the question?"

"The broadest mental equipment," replied the schoolmaster, "always examines the opposite view." It seemed to him safer to be trite and abstruse than to be thoughtful and concrete on these points. He had learned that his philosophy never irritated his wife; while his practical suggestions on the too sore subject of household management often threw the exhausted woman into irrational discouragement and annoyance.

"Room them anywhere you like," he continued. "We will give them the parlor if you say so. The main point seems to me to be not the room, but somebody to put into it."

But within a few hours the main point had entirely changed its base. It was no longer a question of getting women enough to go into rooms. Suddenly it became a matter of rooms enough to hold women. For the Monday morning mail came to Peach Street with a groaning bag, and the carrier emptied most of its contents at the schoolmaster's door.

Hazel pounded through the hall, claimed the piling mail as personal property, and slammed into the study. Her young eyes were electric sparks of triumph.

"There, now! What did I tell you? Come here, Popper! Look, lovely Mommer! Did n't I say I 'd get you a girl? Just count, one — three — six — eight" —

She poured the drifting letters down, until they snowed her mother under on the couch.

"Ten — eleven — thirteen — eighteen — twenty — twenty-five — twenty-eight — twenty-eight women in one mail. If you

can do any better than that, I 'll go out of the business."

"Dear me!" gasped Mrs. Hollis. She could think of nothing more intelligent to say.

"Give me a copy of my advertisement to show to Popsie Voisin," demanded Hazel. "All the girls are jealous to see me writing in the papers."

Hazel carried the advertisement away proudly. She experienced, for the first time, the delights of authorship, with far more than its usual returns. She read the advertisement over and over. Her little head whirled. She felt herself in the company of the gods. Homer and Shakespeare and Tennyson and Thackeray had become brethren to Hazel.

The noon mail brought thirteen letters more to the house. The night delivery left twenty-two. Tuesday morning was signalized by the arrival of thirty. Tuesday night brought another package; Wednesday

THE ASTOUNDED FAMILY COLLECTED THEIR LETTERS AND COUNTED THEM

morning, still another. On Wednesday night, the astounded family collected their letters and counted them. There were one hundred and eighty-six.

Thursday's mail carried the accumulation to the round number one hundred and ninety, and the next few days ran up several more.

CHAPTER X

ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY WOMEN

Mrs. Hollis opened her letters slowly and with a curious reluctance. She who had been distressed by the inferiority and deficiency of the domestic supply offered to her demand was now oppressed by its excess. What a wave of homeless and helpless feminine life! It rolled over her at the first plunge like a breaker by which she felt as if she might be taken off her feet.

She was able to read entirely undisturbed, for she was alone in the house. Mary Nick was not on duty that week; the family were boarding at Mrs. Learner's. Mr. Hollis brought his wife's meals over in a basket, and she partook of them in cold and impressive solitude after he and Hazel had gone to school. By that time she had been faint so long that she had ceased to be hungry.

The first letter was very promising. It set forth the virtues of the writer in no uncertain phrase. She was so nearly all that the human mind could picture as desirable for the position she was expected to fill, and she was so overwhelmed with anxiety to fill it, that Mrs. Hollis felt quite touched. In a burst of candor which would have appealed to any woman, the applicant had confessed her age.

"I am forty-three," she wrote, "and I 'm not ashamed to say so. I am a widow, and I admit it. In me you will find no giddy thing. I bring you the vast values of experience. I am so neat that they call me 'Old Betty,' and so good-tempered that I don't like to live with any of my friends, for they impose on me. There is only one thing I can't stand, and that is to be imposed upon. I don't mind anything else. I am considered a first-class cook. I am a beautiful seamstress. I don't mind a quiet street, as I never go out nights. I can do all your work, and

had rather do up gentlemen's shirts than not. I am a superior laundress. I should like to take the situation at once. You do not mention wages, but I will do your work for two dollars a week."

At this point Mrs. Hollis laid down the letter to get her breath. After oceans of trouble, on what sweet fields beyond the swelling flood was she about to land!

She took up the letter and cast her eye upon the signature, "Mrs. So and Such, South Boston." Appended to the signature was the following: —

"P. S. I forgot to mention that I have a lovely baby boy. He is two years and a half old and no trouble at all. He would stay in his crib while I was working. He is a dear little fellow. You could not help loving him. I hope you will let me take the place day after to-morrow, as I'm just leaving where I am. He had the scarlatina here, but has got nicely over it. He is a remarkable baby, and I consider it a privilege to live with him."

The next letter was brief and modest.

"I should like this situation if you think me competent to fill it. I don't like to sound my own praises. You must ask my friends how I cook, and as to my temper, I 'd rather they spoke for me. There 's something about the sound of your advertisement that made me feel to like your place. I am a widow, thirty-two and without incumbrance from Connecticut. I don't mind hard work, for I done it all my life. I am very lonely, have seen better days, and would appreciate a good home. I can refer you to Mrs. Blanket. She keeps a bakery in Somerville. Or to Mr. Blank, for he runs a milk route in South Windsor."

The next writer was peremptorily inclined.

"I can keep house, but I won't do up gentlemen's shirts, and don't care to be considered a servant by anybody, for I 'm an American citizen and have been mistress of my own house and of a highly connected family."

Half a dozen letters without poignant characteristics followed, — plain, good letters, short and suitable. These Mrs. Hollis read with a wavering brain. Each one as she pondered it seemed to her to contain the desirable woman whom the next ousted from her preference by one more hopeful still. In each, what unfathomed depths of possible peace or woe! In each, what unknown chances whose effects on a tormented family might be nothing less than bane or bliss!

The lady trembled as she opened the envelopes. Her heart beat in her throat. Her daughter's advertisement had poured upon her responsibilities so bewildering that her mind smothered beneath them. She found herself unable to read more than a few moments at a time. As for any form of action to be taken on any of them none occurred to her as possible.

To one of her two hundred letters she took a certain fancy, perfectly irrational, as there

was nothing to recommend this above scores of other replies to Hazel's masterpiece except that the letter was educated in form, expression, and chirography, and indicated a degree of refinement and intelligence which were unmistakable. But these, as Perley reminded herself, might be the very qualities which she would not want in her kitchen. This letter succinctly said: —

"I am, by trade, a working housekeeper, and I think I may claim to understand my business. I know how to keep house, and I 'm not afraid or ashamed to work. I am thirty years old, an American woman, and in excellent health. I ask no particular privileges except that I should not have to share my sleeping-room with any one. I am not precisely what is known as a servant, but it is a matter of indifference to me what you call me. I was attracted to your advertisement by the prospect of a fire in my room. I will refer you to" —

Here followed four or five references of a

rank which would have floated a stranger's character anywhere in Massachusetts. The letter was signed "Kathia Maiden."

Mrs. Hollis laid this letter aside for safe keeping in a volume of the encyclopædia which opened at the articles on Architecture and Biology.

Now, the noticeable thing about Mrs. Hollis's applicants was that there were among them but few professional servants; not more than ten or twelve in the whole two hundred.

Most of the women were of an order entirely unknown to the schoolmaster's wife in connection with domestic service. They were housekeepers, seamstresses, dressmakers, clerks, saleswomen, stenographers, office girls, widows, nurses, canvassers, teachers, and poor relations left out in the storms of life. Their letters were pathetic to such a degree that Perley could not keep back the tears as she read them. She longed to take the whole two hundred into her heart

and home. She was sure that she would find it impossible to refuse any of them. Most of these letters ended with the cry: "I have tried this; I have done that; I have got through with the other. Now, I want a home! I want a home!"

Several of these applications came from educated women. One had received a college degree. Others had a normal school training for the profession of the teacher. One elderly woman was the widow of a physician. One of the writers inclosed a reference from her last employer, and apologized for the misspelling of the same. A startling proportion of the applicants were providing for the support of others, and the most promising letters in the pile closed in some such manner as this: —

"I have a boy sixteen. He must come with me and attend the High School. I hope you are not too far from the schoolhouse."

"I have a little boy seven years old. Of

course, I must bring him, but he will not make you a bit of trouble, and everybody becomes greatly attached to him."

"I am educating my daughter, a girl of twelve. I wish her to attend the Conservatory of Music at Boston every day. She could share my room. I intend to make a musician of her, and if you would allow her to practice on your piano. She practices four hours and a half a day."

"I must find a place for my husband wherever I go. He is in poor health, and I have supported him for ten years. He could take care of your furnace if I shook it, and he has no faults or vices. He does n't eat much, only eggs beaten up with milk."

"I have a blind brother whom I cannot leave. He helps me a great deal about my work, but he can't chop kindlings because the last time he did it he cut off one of his fingers, and I don't like to ask him to bring coal for fear he might fall down the cellar stairs over the coal scuttle."

Thirteen of the applicants requested and required that they be made one of the family. Five proposed bringing babies under a year old. One woman, who owned to being "middle-aged," offered as a special inducement the fact that she had "managed her last employer for three years."

. . . . . .

"My dear," observed the schoolmaster one day abruptly, "I wish you would correct Hazel's manners. A tomboy is pardonable up to twelve. She is thirteen now, and precisely at the age when she needs a training which — I must say — she does not seem to be receiving. I overheard somebody on the cars yesterday call her loud."

Mrs. Hollis flushed to the lobes of her ears and the ripples of brown hair on her forehead. But her lips went white. They moved stiffly, and from them slowly issued these words: —

"If ever a man was dowered with a gift for saying the wrong thing at the wrong

time — I must say you have lately developed into that man."

"I beg your pardon?" ceremoniously from the husband.

"Considering what an inferno this household has been in since Mary married — remember (if you could remember) that my whole struggle for existence has resolved itself into cooking or getting a cook — and if it should by any chance occur to you that the process has brought me to this sofa, and keeps me here! Train my daughter? I have no more strength left to train my daughter than I have for any other of the higher duties of life. I feel so sick — all the time. Why don't you train her yourself?" she cried.

He made no reply, but rose and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down at her with twisted brows. The eyes of husband and wife challenged each other gloomily. George Hollis perceived that he had blundered, but he could not, for the life

of him, have told how. And Perley knew that she had wronged him, but she could not, for the nerve of her, have helped it.

"I am sorry your health is so poor," he remarked awkwardly. He did not mean to be cruel; yet the trivial sentence fell on her like an icicle from the snow-mailed roof. She turned her face to the back of the lounge.

"Out of two hundred women can't you get *any*body?" he continued, without any obvious warmth of manner. Perley did not answer, and the schoolmaster closed the door and went out. His wife had been such a hearty, healthy, energetic woman; she had always sheltered and protected *him* from care; he had rested in her ability and unselfishness and tenderness so long, that it was all but impossible for him to understand that she was really disabled.

This educated man had now a new science to learn. He had before him the lesson of comprehending a strong woman become

weak, a well one grown ill. He was still so dull at his primer that he returned to the study after he had started out, and stood there with his hat in his hand, the fur collar of his overcoat turned to his ears, for the day was shrewishly cold. It had occurred to him suddenly that invalidism is sometimes inherited, and often avoidable. Mrs. Voisin had asked him the other day whether his wife could not be induced to try the Mind Cure, and whether she made an effort? With the inspired stupidity (if I may be allowed the expression) with which Heaven has been known to endow his sex in its treatment of sensitive women, the man blundered back and said: —

"I hope, Perley, you will not allow yourself to become a chronic invalid like your mother. Don't you think — if you were to arouse yourself" —

Perley's shoulders quivered, but she neither moved nor spoke. The schoolmaster went out softly. He thought she might be

asleep, and, to tell the truth, would have been relieved if she had not heard the little speech which he had felt impelled to make. Considering that he had at least bravely done his duty, and had escaped punishment for the effort, he left the house in earnest.

As soon as he was gone Perley "aroused herself" with the desperation of a wronged and wounded woman. She took her two hundred letters and read and reread till her brain waltzed over them madly. She searched for the letter from Kathia Maiden, but could not remember where she had put it. Hurriedly she selected an applicant who happened to give a telephonic address.

"I will take the electric chances," she thought. She dispatched a telephone message by the grocer, and boldly made an appointment in the ante-room of the old Boston and Albany station to meet the stranger that afternoon. It occurred to her in time to suggest that she could herself be identified by the presence of a live carnation

in her bonnet. This method of procedure seemed unduly romantic, if not disreputable; but nothing better suggested itself to her.

Then the sick woman, who had not been from home for weeks, feverishly struggled into her street dress and crawled out of the house. When she had gone a few steps the market man overtook her, and she felt so faint in the smiting cold that she begged for a ride to the station.

"Changin' pretty often up to your place this year — ain't ye?" observed the driver, by way of being pleasant, as he hospitably tucked the horse blanket around her knees.

Once aboard the cars Perley felt somewhat better, though she was acutely aware that the eyes of several Omniscient Suburbans critically observed the live pink carnation in her brown velvet bonnet, — an arrangement of color of which the less said the better.

When Mrs. Hollis dragged herself into the ante-room at the Boston station, she

found it occupied by but one person. This was a woman. Plainly she was "no giddy thing." Experience, which one might safely call vast, spoke from her every feature. At the most charitable estimate she would never see her sixty-eighth birthday again. If she had been a neat, sweet, practicable old lady — but she was so impossible that one forgot to notice how poor she looked. There crept from her eye a sly gleam which made Perley recall all the stories she had ever read of the liability of cooks to insanity. This person did not stipulate that she be made one of the family, but remarked that she had a granddaughter ten years old, who would accompany her during the process of receiving an education in Art.

Perley disposed of this applicant with a rapidity aided by her own whirling brain and failing strength, gave the carnation from her bonnet to a little cripple in the lobby, and managed to get aboard the train; contrived, also, she never knew how, to get off from it without being run over,

took a few steps on the icy sidewalk, and then quietly sank down in the snowdrift piled up by the electric railway, which did not run up Peach Street.

Her next personal notes of life were taken from her own bed, wherein she was puzzled to find herself. Hazel, with squeaking boots, was walking on her heels about the room, under the impression that she was keeping still. The schoolmaster stood looking down; his face was tense and gray. It bore such an expression that his wife wanted to say: "Oh, George! Do you care so much as that?" But she found herself unable to speak, and so put out her hand and tried to touch his cheek. Her arm dropped, and then a woman in a white cap and long white apron stepped up softly, and stood — as care does, as illness will, as mistakes may, as death must — between the husband and the wife. For the instant the nurse seemed to represent in her inexorable attitude all the chances and interceptions which love shall take of life.

CHAPTER XI

THE ATHEIST; AND SHE

"I WANT an Atheist!"

A wild-eyed man dashed into the nearest employment office with this peremptory demand.

"Lent will soon be over," said the proprietor soothingly.

"Lent *is* over for one woman in one house!" blazed the customer. "She may pursue the dictates of her religion under some other roof. Why, madam, my wife has been dangerously ill for weeks; a professional nurse at the house; every hand needed all the time to save a human life — would you believe that in such an emergency our cook cleared out to church every evening and as many mornings as she could throw in? that she kept the afflicted household in

a turmoil positively dangerous to the patient? that she" —

The schoolmaster checked himself. He was shocked to find himself gossiping with the proprietor of an intelligence office, pouring out family confidences like a mere woman. He had always noticed with a certain masculine contempt the tendency of the domestic sex to be voluble upon these petty points. Was he already sinking to the feminine level? And the feminine responsibility had been thrust upon him but six weeks!

"Then she pulled the wool of a black sheep over your eyes successfully," replied the proprietor. "I am a Catholic myself, and I know. There is no such thing as a service every evening in Lent. There is a rosary — but it is not obligatory, and it is not a service. There 's a kind of girl that imposes on Protestant employers in that way. Probably she was gadding most of the time. I 'll venture to say she was a pretty poor Catholic if you had only got at the truth. Did you consult the priest?"

Mr. Hollis shook his head. He had never seen the priest of Sweet Home except on the train or at a caucus. It had never occurred to him that Father O'Leary could possess any kind of relation with his own home and the happiness of his family. What a fearful and wonderful power for one man to hold over another!

"Where did you get this woman?" added the proprietor, with some human stirring at her world-worn sympathies. The gentleman looked haggard enough to have appealed to a heart colder than that which beat in a Celtic breast.

"My wife had two hundred answers to an advertisement," returned the schoolmaster, still confidential, and still conscious of it, and still ashamed of it. "She was taken suddenly ill, and I took the first letter I opened and brought the woman right out."

"It is a severe lesson," replied the proprietor of the employment office, stiffening. "But it will teach you the risks of advertising. Now, our regular agencies" —

"I have but five minutes," interrupted Mr. Hollis. "Where is my Atheist? I'll take a Buddhist, if you have one handy. I would n't object to a Zoroastrian. Even a Confucian might answer."

The proprietor stared. With the perceptible deference which comes of finding one's self put beyond one's intellectual depths, she hastened to say: —

"I can supply you on the spot with a woman whose religious scruples will never trouble her. But remember that I told you this. When you get a poor Catholic you get a poor girl. The most trustworthy servant to be had is the best Irish Catholic."

"We've had two really superior girls," mused the customer aloud. "One was a Catholic. One was a Protestant. . . . But my wife has gone to New York," added the schoolmaster dejectedly. "I am mistress of my own house till she gets back. Do your worst by me! *I* can stand it as long as she is in another and a better place." So the

schoolmaster took his Atheist and ran for his train. When he got home, Hazel and the Atheist eyed each other and took each other's measure scientifically. But the Atheist sweetly smiled.

The convalescent lay back weakly on her mother's billowy lounge. The organized repose of the house, the felt-shod feet of the trained servants, the modest luxury of the appointments, the sense of freedom from the blasting care which had shattered heart and body, the Madonna look in her mother's eyes, the divine cup of her mother's tenderness held brimming to her trembling lips — these offered themselves to the exhausted woman like the surprises of life after death. Even to know that she was in a place where she need never give a thought to the furnace dampers, or wonder whether the plumbing would freeze, was a fact possessing a certain celestial quality.

Lunch served to her without that ulterior

consciousness of responsibility which pursues a woman in her own home even when she lies at the edge of mortal danger — of such was the ambrosia of the gods.

"Mother, what do you suppose was the dream that bothered me most — all the time I was in that fever?" she said feebly, turning her mother's wedding ring about upon the delicate hand which touched her as only the patient invalid knows how to touch the impatient sick. "It was waking up and thinking Mary was back again — seeing her come in mornings with my tray, with the tea and rolls and the sweet apples and cream she always managed to bring me if I were n't just well. I could never get away from Mary."

The next morning when the convalescent woke, a flashing silver tray, daintily touched with a small white silk doily, and holding tea, rolls, sweet apples and cream, pushed open the unlocked door, and behind it Mary — Mary the First — her own Mary,

stood laughing till she cried, and crying till she laughed, and blushing till she could do neither.

"What have they done to yez! What have they done to yez, me darlin'!" blubbered Mary, for the face upon the pillow startled her. And she put down her tray and put her own face into her hands when she saw the havoc which care had wrought.

So Mary served her old mistress for a week or so loyally and lovingly, as only Mary could. But Perley did not confide the story of the last year to Mary, for something restrained her. And Mary did not ask Mrs. Hollis about it, for she had a delicate instinct which forbade her.

And she served her dear mistress with a tact and sweetness of which too much could not be said, but of which little will ever be said, for such are of the rare human devotions that do not feed on words. But Mary could not do this very long, for her baby would be born in June.

"Would ye take offense if I do be namin' her after yez?" asked Mary.

Every grown woman is a little girl in her mother's arms, and to her mother's heart. What poems, what romances, hide unsung and unsaid in the annals of those soft, feminine relations so mysterious to man!

Perley and her mother talked each other tired, and rested each other by long, blissful silences. Perley remembered how she had fancied that her mother did not understand her. She scorned herself for a delusion which seemed to her now to have been purely pathological. It did, indeed, occur to her to ask herself whether the soreness of heart which had so long reddened about her thoughts of her husband might not be a passing disorder, as unimportant as the other. But in this direction she was not yet strong enough to reason. The terrible thing about any alienation between husband and wife is that a moment's weakness can cut a cañon

through the happiness of two lives which it may take years of strength and tenderness to fathom or to bridge.

Perley's thoughts crept perpetually and almost morbidly about the harassing trifles to which her health and comfort had been offered, like flower-decked priestesses to a pagan monster posing under the name of a pagan god.

"The worst of it is," she said, "that nobody comes to conclusions about this matter. We all go on suffering and we all go on experimenting, but we draw no inferences. We learn no lessons. The domestic problem is in a state of eternal effervescence. It never settles to a solution, and Heaven knows if it ever will. It has n't found its chemist."

"Are you so sure it needs chemistry?" replied the older woman, looking gently puzzled. "Does it need more than good sense, and good heart" —

"And good health, and a good income,

and good luck, and a good house on a good city street, with good social standing and good trained service," interrupted the daughter. "Dear little Mother, you are a saint and a martyr, and you know your New York City; but you have never kept house on a small income in the suburbs. Nor in the country," added Perley thoughtfully. "Think of it, in the country! Heaven have mercy on them! When I consider the healthy women made invalids, the children ruined, the homes broken up by bad service, I wonder the Almighty has the patience to see the destruction of so much noble material by such petty causes. Why, Mother, I got so before I had that sickness that I could not think of anything else. I used to steal out to get a breath of air, while my dinner was cooking (or burning), throw a shawl over my head, and go a few steps up and down Peach Street trying to forget, but I looked at every house and said: 'There's the same thing going on in each

one.' The lighted windows looked to me like anxious eyes peering out into a big question as dark as the winter night. Every house was meant to stand for peace, for order, for neatness and sweetness, and joy and comfort, and cheerful growth of character, and for all that was splendid in life. In point of fact, what did they stand for? An eternal struggle to get meals cooked, and rooms swept, and clothes washed, and children taken care of; an everlasting contest between the people able to do these things and the people able to pay for their doing. Every house covered just so much disappointment, anxiety, suspicion, irritation, antagonism between the kitchen and the parlor. It makes my soul sick to think of it! There were n't more than four or five houses on our street where there was n't something. Sometimes it was the cook; then it was the second girl; then it was the nurse; usually it was the general housework girl. Our kitchens are filled to-day with a floating pop-

ulation, with a flotsam and jetsam character. Our work is done now by women who depend for the excitement and amusement of life on going from place to place. The type of the average servant is changing. Nobody knows this better than the minority of disciplined domestics who are left in the ranks. The best of them feel ashamed of their company — hold themselves aloof like the aristocrats of a dying caste. And it 's hit or miss whether any family can strike one of these fine old-fashioned girls. They are in such demand that they could make their own terms if they knew it. We are all living over a burning mine. Nobody knows in whose house the next explosion will take place. Our homes ought to be bowers of rest. They are hornets' nests of worry. My metaphors are getting mixed, but you 're not an Omniscient Suburban, so you won't notice. If I had the nerve and the muscle I 'd do my own work till I died ! I would never again subject myself to what I have endured this year."

"You are my daughter," sighed the invalid mother, "and you are finding it out. You can never be any *more* independent of your servants than you are now."

"Very well, then," said Perley with sudden reanimation of manner, "I am going to have 'lady help' to do my work."

"Is that the latest Boston fad?" asked the New Yorker. "It can't be done."

"It can't be done in your house," said the Boston suburban. "I believe it could be in mine. I see no other way out of it. Ignorance and coarseness have brought us to the pass we're in. Perhaps intelligence and refinement can get us out of it."

"I wish," replied the invalid mother, "that you would touch that bell and ring for Maud to ask Mary to tell Jane to tell Thomas that we'll have the carriage at three."

It had been warmly agreed upon by Mrs. Hollis's family that the subject of the domestic situation at Sweet Home was not to be opened in her presence until such time as her recovery should take vigorous root.

Her husband's letters struck a high octave; their range ran from politics to religion, from love to philosophy. They seemed to her curiously abstract and unsatisfactory — as if he had been writing an essay. Their vagueness struck her as cold, and she laid them away in hurt silence.

But Hazel was not vague. That young lady was distinctly concrete; in fact, her letters had an explicit character which left little for the imagination to fill. Deviated by paternal commands, her reports of the internal history of the schoolmaster's home at that time fortunately turned in the direction of her grandmother, who received three or four times a week such confidences as these:

DEAR GRANSIE: — Whatever on earth did you name her Perley Peace for? You ought to have called her Perley Tormented — Perley Worrie — Perley Maddened Hollis. She 'd go stark, staring crazy if she came home now. Keep her in New York

till she's gray, if you love her! When Popper and I am worn into our gravies she can come home to the funerals. Chain her up till then. You ought to have seen The Atheist! She was the biggest Circus we've had yet. I don't know which of us loved the other most. She could cook decently, but dirt — my gracious to Halifax! And She told me I was a darn fool the day she spilled the butter sauce down my neck. Popper said I'd no business to dwell upon Trifles. He said we were not in a position to. He said it did n't matter whether she called me Miss Hazel as long as we got something to eat. Popper and I don't always agree. But there came a day when I and Popper stood as one Man against The Atheist. Wait till I tell you!

Gransie, dear, can you imagine what a woman would *want* of a pair of suspenders? We could n't. So we never thought of The Atheist. And you know that pretty white silk pair you got for Mommer to give him

Christmas. Well — they just could n't be found.

The Atheist said it was very strange. She said she 'd looked in the coal-hod for them. And the refrigerator. She mentioned some other places where silk suspenders are generally kept. But we could n't find 'em. Then his gold shirt-studs went one at a time. She said Rugby swallowed those. One day I found I could n't find Popper's new blue four-in-hand necktie. Then it came to his dress-suit. He went to get ready for an Alumni banquet in Boston and his dress-suit was n't in that house. The Atheist helped us hunt for that. She helped hard. She looked in the pantry and down in the vegetable cellar. She said it might be Rats. So Popper looked at The Atheist — you know how sweet Popper can look when he is mad — and he said it was his mistake. Come to think of it, Popper said, probably he never had a dress-suit. So The Atheist said she hoped he 'd be able to afford

one soon, and she went off for her Day Out as innocent as a marshmallow. And Popper and I went up to her room. And there lay Rugby snorting and snarling at her door. For her door was locked. So Popper broke it in and he said, "Find my suspenders, Rugby!" So Rugby went up and sniffed at the third bureau drawer, and he opened it with his paws, for you know there is n't anybody as clever as Rugby, and he hauled out those white silk suspenders, and handed 'em to Popper like a gentleman.

So then Popper went for that handsome officer that brought me home the night Ellen without Encumbrance got drunk — for we 've never had one that stole. And Popper was scared stiff as a yardstick. So they got the search warrant and searched and warranted The Atheist's trunk and all her things. And Rugby bit the officer on his heel. But he was so gentlemanly he only said, "Good dog, sir." So they found the blue necktie and Popper's silk handkerchief that I got so

mad Christmas embroidering, and Popper's dress-suit folded away in her petticoat. But Popper would n't persecute her. He said she 'd persecuted us enough — he 'd let the poor devil go. He did now, Gransie. He did say poor devil, but don't you tell Mommer, and I asked The Atheist what under the canopy she wanted of a dress-suit and suspenders, and she cried and said she was going to be married. So it was for his trousseau.

We had n't ever seen any young man round, so we asked her who it was she was going to marry, and she said she had n't made up her mind yet, but she meant to marry somebody before long. And she was getting his trousseau ready. So Popper said we 'd had all kinds but a crazy one, and he guessed we 'd struck it now, and he would n't think of persecuting her. But the officer said we 'd got both kinds now, — two in one. So he said I was a very nice housekeeper, and he went away. And The Athe-

ist went as soon as she got back. So I got supper for Popper — it was burned Welsh rabbit, for it stuck. And Popsie came over to help me. And we thought Popper looked sort of hungry, so we made him some chocolate taffy.

. . . Gransie, we 've got "She!" in the kitchen — truly we have. We 've got an old, old, old, *old* woman. I should think she might run up to two thousand and not know it. She is one of the Two Hundred, and her letter said she was in early womanhood. Popper brought her out on the electrics one day between meals. She 's the oldest thing on the beach, and Putter! — Gransie dear, when I get so old I have to Putter, I 'll say "Now I lay me" and take Rough on Rats, for, Gransie, it 's dreadful to be so old and have to live, or anybody have to live with you. So Popper asked a gentleman to dinner, for he could n't help it, and "She" was three hours getting some potatoes boiled, and some

cold mutton sliced, and canned tomatoes warm, and I bought the charlotte for dessert, and we never sat down till eight o'clock.

"And when I went out into the kitchen at half-past, for it sounded awfully still out there, "She" had gone to bed. She said her legs ached, and she was afraid she was going to have inflammatory rheumatism, — she usually did about this time o' year, — so she left all the dishes for me to do. And next morning I had the breakfast to get. For "She" never got up at all. She said she felt a weakness in the pit of her stomach, and she thought it might be a gastric fever, for she had one occasionally between rheumatic fevers. Gransie, where's that bourne whence no departed cook returns? "She" goes puttering into it to-morrow. Popper 'n' I are going to Mrs. Learner's again. Would you believe, Popper says he thinks we have n't got girls enough? He says he thinks we need a cook and a second girl — to save Mommer — for he wants Mommer home.

He 's getting wild in his eyes, and he sits with his head on his hands on the study table. Gransie dear, next letter there 'll be two of 'em. And then we *shall* go up a spout. Say your prayers, Gransie, say your prayers for us. And may God have mercy on our souls and bodies!

CHAPTER XII

THE TWIN HEIRESSES

GRANSIE, dear, did you ever have an Heiress? Did you ever have a twin? Then we 've beat you all to smash, for we 've got both. I tell you, Gransie, there are high jinks at our house, these days. Keep Mommer chained up a while longer, till we sort of get used to our privileges. We may live up to the Twins in course of time. I don't believe we 'll ever live up to the Heiresses. You see it came this way.

Once you get an idea in Popper's head you know, and you 'd have to crack open his skull to get it out, and you 'd need a nut-pick, at that. So Popper got that idea of having a second girl. So we looked over my Two Hundred and there we found among 'em two sisters that had n't any hope this

side the grave except to come and do our housework, and said they 'd do it cheap to be together. So Mrs. Voisin told him, and lots of Omniscient Suburbans told him, that if he got sisters he 'd wish he never lived through teething, for they told him sisters fight. Mrs. Voisin said she had two that hit each other with teacups, and cut each other's heads open. But Popper would n't listen, for they were women, and he said nobody could make as bad a mess of housekeeping as women had, and he swore a man could n't do worse if he were put to it. So Popper got these two, and, Gransie, it 's a dime show and refund your money if you don't find it worth the price.

First, Gransie dear, whatever possessed them to be Twins? We did n't advertise for a Twin, nor they never let on they were Twins till they got their trunk unpacked — for they only had one trunk between 'em, Gransie — and what nation they are the Lord that made 'em only knows. Popper calls them Scandina-

vian — Anglo-Saxon — Celtic — Teutonic — Semitic. When they 'd been in the house a half an hour they mentioned that they were Twins, and said they could do things together nicely. When they 'd been here an hour, they said they 'd forgotten to mention they were Heiresses. Their names are Dolle and Rolle, and Dolle is Heiress to eighty thousand dollars, but Rolle is only Heiress to twenty. So seeing you 're a Twin that makes you Heiress to a hundred thousand dollars, does n't it? I could see Popper sort of stagger up against the wall when he heard this. He 'd kept up very well till then. But he turned so pale I went for Mommer's smelling-salts, and I got the olive-oil cruet instead and spilled it all over him. Then he told me I had n't the sense of a windmill — he did now, Gransie, — a windmill. So I felt a good deal hurt, and I went out to Dolle and Rolle and gave 'em a few orders to relieve my mind. You 'd better believe the Twin calls me Miss Hazel, and don't you for-

get it. But the Heiresses won't say Yes 'm — I can't scare it out of 'em.

So I told 'em to sweep the hall and get the dinner, for Popper 'n' I were n't on speaking terms just then, and I had to jam slap off to school, for we had to run home at noon recess to keep house. I think a young lady that is head of a house ought to have a vacation from school, but I and Popper don't agree about that. So Dolle said when their fortune came in could n't they hire the sweeping? And I told her they could. And Rolle asked me if when they inherited I 'd mind if they had the caterer get dinner? And I told her no, not in the least. So I went to school.

When I got home again with Popper, for I had to go somewhere with Popsie, I 'll be boiled to ice-cream candy if those Twins were n't sweeping the hall, the two of them together, for one would take the broom and then the other, and one would sit down on the divan and rest while the other one swept,

and then the other one would rest and another sweep, and they 'd been the mortal afternoon, for our Mary did the whole thing in half an hour — and dinner was n't in sight through the Lick telescope. So I went and got dinner, for Popper says I get a very poor but respectable dinner. And he says if we don't get another thing out of our heavy afflictions he 'll get some primary grade domestic education into his daughter's head. So I reminded him he meant to say his daughter's windmill, but I got the dinner, for I 'm sort of sorry for Popper. He misses Mommer to that pass, I think he 'd have a galloping consumption and go off if anything happened to Mommer. I wish you would put her up to write to him every day. He prances about after that postman like a squirrel after a chestnut burr — and when there 's nothing in it he sort of doubles up and looks most as old as "She."

P. S. Popper 's just told me about the

second girl. He says you sent the money for her, and Mommer was n't ever to know, and I was n't ever to tell, for he said I could keep a secret better than a good many better behaved girls.

You 're a sort of a nice little Gransie, after all. I wish you could whisk about like other Grandmommers, and prance around, — not to stay on that old lounge. . . .

Gransie, our Twin is too funny for a more serious world. I 've laughed till I split open my Scotch-plaid dress under the arms. Popper 's a conquering hero, and all the Omniscient Suburbans are wrinkled up with envy, for they said they 'd throw things at each other and spat all day. Gransie, don't you tell, but if they only *would* spat we 'd go down on our knees and thank Heaven. I suppose it comes of being a Twin, but, Gransie, we can't separate them with a battering ram. Ring the door bell and both of 'em put on their aprons and come to answer it. Say " Get the luncheon," and Dolle puts

on the potatoes and Rolle looks over her shoulder to see her do it. Order some windows cleaned, and Rolle takes the cloths and soap, and Dolle carries the basin, and Rolle rubs a little and asks Dolle how it looks, and then Dolle rubs and Rolle says how it looks. They go about with their arms around each other's neck, and they kiss each other. Popper says he 'd rather they 'd square off and hit out any day. It takes the two of them to fill a lamp. It takes them both to empty a waste-basket. It takes the whole of them to iron a pocket handkerchief.

We had Popsie and Mrs. Voisin for supper Sunday night, Gransie, for Popper wanted to show off his sisters, I guess, and when I touched the bell to change the plates both of 'em came in together with their arms around each other's neck. And, Gransie, Mrs. Voisin asked of what nationality they were, for she said she did n't know but they were Siamese. And, oh, Gransie, there 's no

BOTH OF 'EM CAME IN TOGETHER

use keeping it up any longer, for, Gransie, dear, they don't know *any*thing, and they can't do what they do know, and Popper says of all incompetence — and, Gransie dear, we 're sick and tired, we 're tired and sick of it all! And I 'd like to cry if I were n't ashamed. For the house is piled with work that is n't done, — it 's *piled* — and Popper 'n' I sit down and look at it when we come from school, for I don't have much time, you know now, Gransie, and keep my rank, do I, Gransie?

So Popper says he thinks our Heiress had better go inherit its fortune, and Twin it under some other and more imposing roof. He says we 're too humble for It. He says we can't live up to It. . . .

So I told Popper, for we had a faculty meeting all to ourselves to-night, and a pretty sober one it was, Gransie, for we 're sort of down about everything. And I told Popper, if he said so, I 'd give up having an education and take to general house-

work, and he could pay me three dollars and a half a week till I could make waffles, when I should ask four, and then Mommer could come home, and we 'd be happy ever after. So Popper kissed me, and said if it had been Senior year he 'd think of it, but seeing I was nothing but a Freshie he was much obliged to me, but we 'd struggle for existence a little longer. . . . And, Gransie, you won't believe it, but he did, he said I was growing Womanly, and he said I was a Comfort. So I told him if I was it was purely accidental, and I was liable to break out a disgrace to humanity any time. But I said I 'd try to put it off till we got a girl. . . .

Oh, Gransie, the most delicious thing yet! Popper went into the Sociological Bureau to-day and gave his name, and the manager said: —

"Well! What do you want now?"

"Courtesy, madam," said Popper. So the

manager blushed, but she said ours was a very difficult place, for it was there we got Miss Highwater. She said she sent us an excellent lady who reported the work extremely severe, and said the cook-stove was out of repair, and Miss Highwater said the coal was poor, and the hours for meals exacting, and we needed a French cook to suit us. So she said she 'd try again, but she could see that we were very hard to please, and she said What did he want now?

"Nothing, madam," said Popper. "Nothing from your office, now nor at any future time!" So Popper walked out of the Sociological Bureau.

Gransie, we 've struck a Widow. Such a lovely Widow with a becoming crape veil, for she said her heart was broken, but she could still cook, only she had a girl six years old. So, if I wanted the Widow, I 'd got to find a boarding-place for that girl, for she

felt quite grieved we would n't take her. Gransie, I 've paddled up and down in the mud for five days all my out-of-school time, for there 's been an awful Easterly storm, and there is n't a house in Sweet Home will board that child, for nobody wants children, for I 've been to seventeen. And Popper said he thought it was paying a pretty high premium for a cook when he saw me gewholloping up and down the streets in my rubber boots, and getting a sore throat, for I got pretty wet. So Popper 'n' I think of advertising like this: —

Highest Premiums in the Market.
Offered by the Principal of the Sweet Home High School.
For a Cook.
Special Inducement to Widows with Families.
Children Boarded out Free.
Babies received in the house and considered a privilege.
Particular Attraction to Maiden Ladies.
Husbands provided at Short Notice.
Trousseaus thrown in.

. . . The other day, Gransie, Mrs. Voisin came in to borrow our Encyclopædia, for the Omniscient Suburbans were going to have a paper on Agnosticism and Bigotry. So I got her the A's and B's, and the one where the A and B are bobbled up together. And when I opened the book out popped a letter. So it was one of my Two Hundred, and it was the nicest, cleverest letter you ever read, and it was signed "Kathia Maiden." So I read it over, and I said, "Popper, I 'm going to see Kathia Maiden." But Popper said it was so long ago she 'd be scattered to the four points of the compass. That 's the way Popper 'n' I put each other down these days, for we 've got to that pass we 're too discouraged to make believe. So I did n't say any more to Popper, but I sat flop down and wrote to Kathia Maiden. I don't suppose I 'll ever see the first symptom of an answer. But I feel it in my bones that Kathia Maiden was meant for us, like old maid's husbands that died teething when

they don't show up, and if she never does turn up, I 'll go into mourning for her, like a girl I heard of down East that went into black for her lover because he was killed in the Spanish War, and everybody knew she never had a lover, but she said she knew he was killed in the Spanish War.

Gransie, Gransie! She did n't wait for me to come to see her, and she is n't scattered to the compass, and she came smash! out here by the next train, like a business woman, and it was Saturday, and I was at home, for I had all the work to do. So I went to the door, and there she was, and she looked — I can't tell you how she looked, for I could have put my arms round her neck and kissed her, for she looked so. But I did n't, for I remembered I was the Lady of the House. So she came in and we sat down and talked it all out, Gransie, like any two girls, only she is n't a girl, she 's very old — as much as thirty. But she said she expected to see an

older lady, so I told her about Mommer, and she said: "Oh! That explains it. I was a little perplexed," she said. "There was something a trifle unusual about the advertisement." (She did n't say Ad.) "I did n't know just how to take it," she said.

So I looked her bang in the eye, and I owned up. "*I* wrote that advertisement," said I. "Nobody saw it. I sent it off on the sly, and I got the awfulest rowing for it I ever got in my life since I put a kitten and a cream-cake into the Superintendent of Schoolses hat when I was younger than I am now," I said. So she looked at me, and I looked at her, and she began to laugh, for her eyes are blue and have funny stars to them, and I began, and we both began, and then we laughed. And I said: "We 're Babes in the Woods, this family, for we 've got lost in a forest of Girls that can't and Girls that won't, and Girls that don't know how to do things, and Girls that get sick or their mothers tumble down whenever they

can do things, and it 's most killed Mommer. So Popper 'n' I are about stark, staring crazy," I said. "If you 'll come and take care of us," I said, "for Mommer 's got so used up she 's no more fit to keep her own house than a Filipino baby with a whooping cough," I said, "if you 'll come and make this house happy, I 'll love you all my life," I said. So Kathia Maiden looked at me, and I looked at Kathia Maiden, and she had a pleasant look as if she sort of liked me. So I made up my mind I would n't care whether she called me Miss Hazel, and she is n't like anybody else we've seen, Gransie, for she 's like a lady, Gransie; she truly is, and if you dare to laugh, Gransie — I 'll send the Twin Heiress to do your cooking. So she said she 'd think it over, and she looked at the house, and I told her she should have the sewing-room fitted up, for I 'd promised her a fire, and I would n't have thought of offering her that freezing old attic. And, Gransie, if she thinks it over the wrong way,

and should n't come, I should go up a spout and stay there, for I 've set my heart on Kathia Maiden, and don't you forget it.

Fast on the feet of this last letter, one of Hazel's own telegrams, constructed regardless of expense, flew wildly to her grandmother in New York: —

She 's a Daisy. She came yesterday. We had waffles for breakfast. But she won't promise to stay forever till she 's seen the Mistress of the House. Send Mommer splash home by express.

HAZEL.

P. S. I 've offered her half a dollar more a week. H.

CHAPTER XIII

KATHIA MAIDEN

May was in the world, but February drifted in the heart of the convalescent, in cold corners, like patches of forgotten snow. She stepped off the Limited Express slowly, with the careful footing of one who has long been weak. The mysterious advance guards of health had already surrounded her. Color and contour had brightened and heightened, but she would have been ashamed to say how her courage fell at coming home. The too familiar cares of her household reapproached her with heavy tread. She felt babyish enough to want to run back and hide her head in her mother's lap.

No one seemed to be there to meet her, and she had walked a few steps dejectedly (it was in the old Providence Station), when

she felt her bag dexterously caught out of her hand, and herself smartly taken off her feet. A tremendous hug took her into big, warm arms, and then she perceived that it was her husband's spring overcoat on whose shoulder her head was brought to a peremptory repose.

"Oh! I did n't think you could get off to come in," she breathed.

"The superintendent and the whole board could n't have kept me! I just caught the 2.25, and ran all the way over here. I 've got a cab all ready. It has rubber tires. We 'll get the 3.15. You do look better! I did n't dare believe it. But you do, you do!"

So he babbled on like a boy. She listened to him, smiling. She did not seem inclined to talk much. She laid her head back and scrutinized him.

"You don't look so badly yourself — not as I expected. You 've picked up, somehow. There 's a look about your eyes. You

have n't had any good news, have you? And that tangle is half untied in your forehead."

He laughed. "We 're going to untie all the tangles. You 're not brought back to be tied up. You do look better! But I 'm not satisfied. We must have a different expression."

His boyish cheerfulness clouded over a little. It occurred to him that he had exceeded her in warmth of welcome, and his mind vibrated between several causes that he could think of as perhaps accounting for this. A momentary chill blew across his manner.

"Who 's there?" she asked abruptly. "Mary Nick?"

"No."

"Are we going to Mrs. Learner's? I can't *quite* walk so far, yet. But you could bring over the basket. It 's easier when there 's no snow. I had n't thought of that; there won't anything come so hard, now it is n't winter. I think I shall be able to get on nicely."

"I think you will," with a mysterious half-smile. "Are you particular about our boarding at Mrs. Learner's? I can bring your dinner over, if you prefer it, of course. But I did n't know."

"Oh, you have somebody, then! I suppose it 's one of the Two Hundred. Have you had her long?" She spoke cheerfully enough, but there was no smile in her eyes. In her heart she said, "Now, I've got it all to go through over again."

"I did n't say we had anybody. You can't think what a housekeeper Hazel has grown into," he went on with abnormal good spirits.

"*Hazel?* But Hazel must go to school. I can't have Hazel's education interrupted." Hazel's mother spoke a little sharply. But Hazel's father exhibited neither pain nor impatience at the nervous weakness of his wife's voice and manner. She was still a convalescent. He looked at her indulgently.

They did not talk much coming out in

the train. Sweet Home was in her spring dress and had her prettiest look. The well-kept shrubs at the station were in full leaf and bud. People were in their light suits, and chatted gayly. The lady who wore the green costume last winter came down in dove-colored cloth to meet a cook, and carried her off proudly.

The sun seemed to fill the happy suburb with melted gold. The maples had worn and dropped their red tassels. Birds were singing everywhere, and the children, out from school, were scampering about in little May parties, with baskets of violets and saxifrage, and fox-berries.

"It is better than New York," said Perley suddenly.

She and her husband rode up Peach Street in the Sweet Home cab. The Peach Street maples, young in leaf, made a triumphal arch over their heads, and under it they drove slowly. Two or three Omniscient Suburbans came out on their piazzas and

kissed their hands to the sick neighbor. Mrs. Voisin and Popsie ran and opened the cab door, and poured in a broadside of pleasant, affectionate welcome. Perley's color climbed her cheeks.

"It is nice to get home," she said, as if she had been answering an argument. "Oh, now — now, I can see the house! Where 's Hazel? How the woodbine has grown! — and the spiræa was never so large before! Where 's Hazel? Why, George, I thought you said Mary Nick was n't here!"

"I did n't know she was," said George. His face tumbled forty fathoms down.

Mary Nick stood outside on the concrete walk. The caddie was with her, hugging something in a basket. Mary Nick and young Nick were laughing. Young Nick pushed the basket into the cab window. It held a chicken, roasted, stuffed, and neatly wrapped in a fresh napkin.

"I thought it might help out yer first dinner," pleaded Mary Nick. "I did n't know

what kind of a Tom-fool ye 'd have on hand now. This chicken might have been enjoying life yet if I *had* a known. But seein' I 've took the liberty mebbe it 'll slice up cold. For I heard ye was a comin', and I 'm that glad to see ye back, I run up here to tell ye so. It ain't everybody that treats a scrub-woman nor yet one that accommodates as I 've been treated in this house, Mis' Hollis. And now I see as plain as me nose on me face ye won't need *me* no more. I 've come to wish ye luck of her, and long life to ye, and may ye get well and stay so! . . . Nick! you clear out and set on the fence or you 'll get a wollopin' ! — There 's that red-headed dog ! "

" I don't seem to understand," began Perley. But it was not necessary to understand anything at that moment. For Rugby had heard her voice. If anybody in the house had cherished any scheme for keeping Rugby in the background till it was time for his cue, this plot was frustrated by one mighty bark, and mighty bound.

The old dog dashed down the steps and into the cab. He put his arms about his mistress's neck and laid his red head against her cheek. There he cried, as a gentle child cries, plaintively and persistently. Perley kissed Rugby with a blur in her eyes.

Then she felt the old setter pushed vigorously off. There was a commanding cry of "Mommer! Mommer!" And Hazel had torn the passenger out of the carriage, and pulled her up the walk between the spiræas and weigelia bushes. George Hollis stood, smiling and neglected, leaning up against the wall, for Hazel had the right of way.

And Perley said: "This is better than New York. It is better than anything in the world."

. . . . . .

"Mommer," said Hazel, with her own unexpectedness, "make up your mind for a blow. Prepare to bear up under it. We've got a new woman. She came five days ago."

"I'll try to make the best of it," returned the convalescent. But she visibly drooped.

"Mommer," proceeded Hazel, with the pretty new womanliness that so well became her, "Mommer, this is our new housekeeper. Miss Kathia Maiden, this is my mother. She can't help it. It is n't her fault."

Mrs. Hollis turned with the dejected politeness by which she was accustomed to greet new domestic experiments. Then, on her weary face there rested an expression such as no applicant for a situation in the schoolmaster's home had ever seen before.

Standing in the doorway she saw a young lady, tall, slender, blonde, and smiling. Kathia Maiden was in her working-dress, for she was getting dinner. She wore a pretty costume of pale blue cambric, covered with a long white linen apron, that had a picturesque bodice with a Scotch effect, and crossed the shoulders. Dainty white frills finished her throat and wrists. Her hair was a natural sheen of yellow light, and it rippled over her forehead, but was brushed closely from her neck and brought over a high

"MOMMER, THIS IS OUR NEW HOUSEKEEPER"

comb, which gave a certain stateliness to the carriage of her head. An exquisite neatness and sweetness pervaded her.

Her face was delicate of feature; her eyes were blue, and so nearly intellectual that it would have seemed an offense to call them intelligent. Her mouth was large enough to be generous, but cut so carefully with a chisel that, while it had preserved the lines of refinement, it had lost none of those which indicate kindness of impulse and warmth of heart. When Kathia Maiden spoke, Mrs. Hollis said to her own soul: —

"This is the voice of a lady. How can it succeed?"

"Mommer," whispered Hazel, jumping on the study-table, and swinging her feet, while she put her lips to her mother's ear, "*you're* on trial this time. You're the one to be engaged. She won't stay unless she likes *you*. Excuse me for whispering" (to Kathia Maiden), "but I have to pony Mommer a little. She isn't used to you.

She has n't learned her lesson. She 's thinking of Miss Highwater, and Ellen without Encumbrance, and The Atheist, and the Twin Heiresses, and all those. She does n't know you 're a regular daisy. You must excuse her."

"I am thinking," interrupted Mrs. Hollis slowly, "that I have not seen any one like you, Miss Maiden, and that I feel almost afraid to tell you how much I hope from your presence in this house. — I have been a sick woman lately, and I have needed domestic help of a kind that I could not command. I am still a little tired, not strong yet. I shall appreciate all you can do to restore peace and happiness to my house. We do need it!" she added in a burst of candor.

"It occurred to me that you did," replied Kathia Maiden, smiling. "I am always happiest where I am most needed. I think I was made up that way. Shall I take your bag upstairs? Is n't there something I can do for you? Dinner will be ready

early. I thought you would be tired traveling."

Mrs. Hollis's eyes followed Kathia Maiden till the door closed.

"George," she said, sinking back in the brown corduroy Morris chair, "what do you think I almost said to that woman? 'Your grace, mercy and peace be with us.' I did indeed. I just saved myself."

"Why did n't you say it?" contended Hazel. "She 'd do all the better for it. She 's that kind."

. . . . . .

To a perfect dinner succeeded a perfect evening. Quiet comforted the house, for Kathia Maiden was not of those women who feel compelled to wear squeaky shoes in their employer's homes on account of some mysterious weakness of their feet.

"She steps like an angel," announced Hazel. "She always does. She never slams. She does n't bounce — like me. She does n't yell. She does this housework like

a cloud — sort of floating in and out. Oh, and she reads — my gracious to goodness! she reads Stevenson and Meredith and George Eliot, and the 'Sun' editorials, and all those awful things. She asked for Emerson last evening, and I offered her Aristotle. I'm going to give her the Odyssey in the original next time just to see what she'll do."

"That child's in love," observed the mother, when Hazel had waltzed out of the room. "She's fallen in love for the first time in her life. Girls do, you know — with older women; sometimes it's quite serious."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated the father. "She has the safest, sanest, sweetest object for a first experiment that could be prayed for. There was a time when I was afraid of that policeman."

"I was n't," returned Mrs. Hollis calmly. "There was a lieutenant. He visited Popsie's mother for two days. I was relieved when he was gone."

"Anything in uniform," replied the

schoolmaster. "It does n't much matter what."

"I suppose I must get up early, and see to breakfast?" said the wife patiently, after a pause.

"You are not to see to anything," commanded George Hollis hotly. "You have n't got to. Nobody has to. Kathia Maiden does it all."

"Have we gone back to the miracles?" asked Perley. She looked as if she had been hit on the head by the boom of a boat, and were slowly regaining lost consciousness, opening her eyes on a strange sea.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Hollis and Kathia Maiden sat together. They had been talking for a long time. Kathia's lashes were a little wet, and shone like gold dust where they lay upon her cheeks.

"So that is how it all came about," said Mrs. Hollis gently. "I shall respect your confidence, and I thank you for it. No one

else need know the story. It is a hard one, and if you would allow me to — express any sympathy" —

"Oh, thank you," said Kathia Maiden, dashing the drops from her eyes. "I don't feel that I need very much. All women have stories. It 's only a question of how we read them."

"You have read yours nobly, and I honor you for it."

"I knew that I should tell you," said Kathia Maiden, "as soon as I saw your eyes. Does my work satisfy you?" she asked abruptly. With quiet dignity she made it apparent that she wished to divert the conversation from her personal affairs.

"You so much more than please me," returned the employer, "that I am afraid to tell you how I feel about it, for fear I spoil you altogether. But, now," she added, "does my home satisfy *you*?"

The housekeeper hesitated. "No woman," she said slowly, "is ever perfectly content

in any home except her own. There 's that difference, and there always will be, between the domestic employer and the employee; but I am happier with you than I have ever been since I left my father's house, and if you would like to have me stay" — She broke off, and the two women clasped hands.

"Now," said the convalescent, "I shall get well."

"It will be my real pleasure to help you," replied the housekeeper prettily.

"How did it happen," asked Mrs. Hollis, "that you turned your mind in precisely this direction?"

"Once when I was traveling with my — when I was traveling," answered Kathia Maiden, "I bought a little paper book on the cars. It was called something like 'My Lady Help.' It took hold of my imagination, and I thought some time I would like to try the experiment. I have done everything else, — crocheted, and canvassed, done hack work for the newspapers, and read to

invalids, and taught school. I have kept boarders; I have run a summer hotel; I have done dressmaking, I have been an attendant, I've done all the regulation, lady-like things, and I'm tired of it all, — cold hall bedrooms, and sleeping with cross sick people, and keeping house for low-class widowers with big families and tremendous washes, and small pay, and — Oh, the talk! I can't say which were worse, — the things said about you, or the things said to you. One of them told me the first time I stepped into the house that I need n't expect to marry him, for he never meant to get caught again. I got so tired of it that I used to cry half the night. I want a home. I know how to conduct a home; I understand housekeeping thoroughly; I like housework, and I respect it. So I made up my mind that when I found a pleasant place where there were ladies and gentlemen, and where the people would respect me, I'd give it a fair trial."

"We have had a cruel year in this house," mused Mrs. Hollis. "It is n't necessary to give you details; but really, I think it has been harder than we deserve. We 're reasonable people. We 're not unkind nor unfair to those who work for us. I can't quite see through the whole thing."

"It 's in the air," replied Kathia Maiden quickly. "The times are surcharged with it. It 's a day of domestic anarchy. Your experience is not extreme."

"Perhaps not," sighed Perley Hollis. "I know a lady on Peach Street who had four cooks in two weeks. We never sank so low as that."

"I knew one in the town I came from who had forty in one winter," suggested Kathia Maiden, with a soothing smile.

"Now, in our case," continued Mrs. Hollis earnestly, "we can't see that we have been to blame except about that cold room, and that was only force of habit. We shall get yours fitted up prettily in a few days.

You see the furnace heat will run in. Would you like to go in town and choose the carpet and curtains and some of the little things? I want it to seem like your own room."

"I have never had so pretty a room since" — began Kathia Maiden. But she broke off.

Mrs. Hollis hastily resumed: "We have been unfortunate, as I said, but it seemed to us that if other householders were no more to blame than we" —

A bite of bitterness chilled Kathia Maiden's warm, sweet face.

"But they 're not all like you. And you don't know anything about the other side. I 've heard things in the employment offices that would make you sick to listen to. Nobody has treated *me* very badly," added Kathia Maiden, lifting her head a little. "Once I went into a place where they advertised for a housekeeper. It was a private school, and they said they wanted a lady at the head of the domestic department. They

showed me my room. It had a bare floor, no washstand, no bureau, one broken chair (no fire, of course), one ragged comforter on the bed, and the pillow-case was torn from hem to seam. I said good-morning, and walked out of the house. Then one day I went to one of the best offices in Boston, where there is a very nice class of women, not rough servants, and a lady sat down to talk with me, and asked me if I kept sober."

"Perhaps there *is* another side to it," considered Mrs. Hollis thoughtfully. She looked out over Kathia Maiden's shining head into the May afternoon. Her mind had gone back to Mary, and all Mary's strange successors filed through it in a grotesque procession. Perley Hollis closed her eyes and did a short sum in common addition.

"Hazel?" she asked dreamily, for Hazel had bounced in at one door as Kathia Maiden glided out of the other, "was Miss Highwater the sixth?"

"Seventh!" cried Hazel gleefully, as if she had hit a point of preëminent family pride. "Mommer, you had one girl for thirteen years. And now you've had thirteen in one year — and don't you forget it. I thought perhaps you might," added Hazel, "if I did n't mention it."

CHAPTER XIV

SWEET HOME

JUNE was in the world, but the snow was not quite melted from the corners of Perley's heart. A chill, whose nature she did not try to explain, crept over the warmth of her sunniest hour.

Her strength came to her, but more slowly than it should. Cushioned in chair or couch, she sat or lay out in the garden, on the piazzas, on the little lawn, the sunlong summer day. Light, perfume, color, honey, birds, a bee, a butterfly, and splashes of flowers dashed in on living green, appealed gently to her exhausted nerve. The beautiful horizons of Sweet Home, defined by violet-tinted hills and intervales of sea-tinted meadows, looked down above the thick

suburban shrubbery, and in through the lace-work of tall larches and purple beeches; and through the dome of the maple arch that spanned the pretty width of Peach Street the calm face of the June sky watched the convalescent with an expression that seemed to her half of pity, half reproach.

A big, red-brown figure, like a design cut from sandstone, solidly on his yellow sofa-pillow at her feet, or on the trail of her gowns lay Rugby. The old setter would not leave her. Laughing Kathia tempted him with soup-bones and with sandwiches, but Rugby regarded her scornfully.

Young Nick, in the master's golf stockings, made faces at Rugby over the garden wall; but though the setter's upper lip wrinkled, he preserved the composure and the dignity of a dog who preferred kissing his mistress to devouring a caddie. Rugby's head lay softly on the dearest lap; his eyes sought the surest answering eyes; the sweet-

est hand caressed his curling ears; and the aging dog entered Heaven before his time.

The conduct of the household expressed itself like a fine art, — science behind it, aspiration in it. It was incredible that the simple machinery of daily life which had been clogged so cruelly for the worn-out mistress of a worried house could be made to spin so merrily, so perfectly, with the "light touch" which, whether in life or in literature, gives such exquisite results. Kathia Maiden put her own sweet nature into the management of this harassed home. Something about her gave dignity to the roughest manual work. One would no more have used the word "menial" of any duty that she performed than one would of a Portrait of a Lady embroidering tapestry in a dim gallery. She gave wings to the heaviest task. She made poetry of the dullest duty. She "handled a dish-mop like a paint-brush," (so Hazel said), and she was dainty to the finger-tips. A fair spirit set in a harmoni-

ous body made her all womanly, and kept her so. She did housework as a lady does. She found herself in a family of gentlefolk, and the relation, begun in service, emerged into friendship by the subtle power of that spiritual caste which brings all delicate natures to their own level — never so swiftly nor so surely as in the "Kingdom called Home." The convalescent flung down the responsibility of her house, and felt it taken up without a word, — no fuss, no fret, none of the fatuous complaining which is the great defect of women's work; she felt it taken up, and taken from her by soft, strong hands.

. . . . . .

The schoolmaster came out into the garden. His wife was lying on her wicker couch under a linden-tree. Her dress was white (for the descending day was still brightly hot), and she had thrown down to her feet the gold-brown knit afghan that her husband liked. A thin white shawl of

an old-fashioned barége material, satin-striped, covered her figure. Rugby was lying on the heavy folds of the afghan. A daintily appointed table stood within reach; it held all the little comforts so important to the sick, and so easily forgotten in a household of healthy people.

"She remembers everything," said Mr. Hollis, moving the table, and bringing a garden chair close beside the couch.

"She is a lovely being," breathed Perley, with a sigh of content, as long and as healthy as a strong dog's. "Why, she is even educating Hazel. I don't think the child uses one slang word where she did four. There is nothing which has to do with us that she does n't take into her heart. She is a gospel miracle. I wake every morning and say, 'She belonged to New Testament days.' I 've dreamed her. She can't last."

"She *will* last!" insisted the schoolmaster in a ringing voice. He put out his hand

and touched the white shawl, passing his finger clumsily up and down one of the satin stripes. He was troubled to find how ill at ease he felt, and embarrassed in this tête-à-tête with his own wife. When he came to think of it, they had hardly sat together quietly like this and talked since she came home. Something had always prevented or deferred. He could not have said whether this had been wholly accidental; he had instinctively avoided asking himself the question. Whatever it was that had slid in between them, they had gone on treating it in the old good way, — not speaking about it. The man would have said that they had met it by not thinking about it.

He turned now and deliberately studied his wife's face. Dashes of light broken through linden leaves trembled over it and stirred across her white dress and shawl, delicately resisting the shadow in whose shelter she lay.

Returning strength had touched her color

and expression vividly, yet she did not seem quite well. She did not look as he knew that she ought to look by this time. Her eyes were averted from him heavily, as if their own weight dragged them away, and when he scrutinized her so she blushed rather painfully; he thought the curve of her lips quivered. If he had been shocked to find that he felt himself uncomfortable in her presence, he was now startled to perceive that he embarrassed her.

"You don't recover. You are not improving fast enough," he began in a sharp, high voice.

"Oh, I 'm doing well enough," she replied indifferently. "Really I am. Don't give me a thought."

"You are not happy!" No woman could understand the amount of courage which it cost the husband to bring out these simple words. He felt himself suddenly and mysteriously in the position of a man who has to court his own wife over again — always an

alluring situation, and one of the most romantic in life.

"You don't get well," he repeated commandingly, "because you are not happy."

"Are you?" She looked straight up through the linden leaves at the observant sky. This flank movement well-nigh routed George Hollis. If he said no, the burden of proof would rest on him. If yes, he dared not consider the possible consequences. It struck him as safer not to reply at all. Instead, he stopped fingering the barége shawl, and with a hesitation which he did not know whether to call pitiable or contemptible, he laid his hand on hers. She stirred a little, but he did not remove it.

"If you could possibly tell me — if you could talk with me as you used to do," he pleaded. Then his voice and manner took on a swift, authoritative change. "Perley! I can't, and I'm not going to — I won't live so any longer! I will know what is the matter, and you must tell me!"

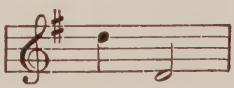
"If you don't know without being told, I never *can* tell you!" cried the wife.

"Popper! Popper!" cut in the clarion-clear young voice with whose interruptions it was impossible for these two to be vexed. (So easy is it for perfect love to forgive defective tact.) Hazel regarded the emotional crises of married life with the same impartial scorn that she would have bestowed on Meredith, George Eliot, or the "Sun" editorials. "Popper! Stop courting out there, and bring Mommer slam up to dinner! Kathia Maiden's got a strawberry shortcake with jib topsails to it. She's too good for the likes of us."

"I'll take mine out here if you don't mind," said Perley Hollis awkwardly. "It seems to be too warm to walk in. Will you be disappointed?" she asked in a different tone.

"I will bring it out myself," he replied. She could make nothing of the words or of his manner of saying them. The school-

master brought out her tray, — Kathia Maiden composed a tray like a picture, — and returned in silence to his own dinner. As he walked up the garden path, his head hung to his breast, but that was his way in thought as much as in sorrow. His wife watched him, shading her eyes from the slanting sun. "Which is it?" she thought. The great drama of marriage moves on so strongly, yet so slowly, always interrupted by such trifles, always deviated by such small side-scenes, yet always gathering the power and the pathos and the preciousness that belong to no other situation in human life.

He stayed but the shortest time, and hurried back to her. As he came down the garden walk, he gave the little whistle with which he had been used to announce his coming home to her.

As the low and loving notes stirred the quiet air, both remembered how long it was since the pretty signal had dropped out of their habit, and both wondered why. Had he not called? Had she not listened? Who could say how it was?

She was visibly moved, and when he stood beside her she sighed almost inarticulately: "I used to think that used to say: '*Here* I am! *Here* I am!'"

"And I," he smiled, "I thought it said: '*Dear* wife! *Dear* wife!'"

Hazel came out just then and took the tray, and made as if she would run back; but Kathia Maiden, glancing from the window, might have been seen to dissuade the child. The day dropped fast. The low-lying glory of a great sunset swept the grass-blades and fired the edges of the leaves.

"Are n't you chilly?" he asked, pulling up the thick bright afghan. "You should be so careful. It is so important to — me."

He had begun quietly enough, almost in-

differently, she thought. But then his voice deepened suddenly.

"Dear," he pleaded, "I can't bear it any longer! Tell me your heart! Tell me what has come between us" —

"It was the words," she panted. "It was the words we said."

"The words?" repeated George Hollis. He looked at her blindly. "What words?"

"Oh," cried the woman, "you could *forget!*"

"Yes," said the man proudly. "And I thank God I could!"

She did not answer. He watched her, trembling like a lover. Then he put out his hand.

"We were both tired out, and worried, dear — and I did not half understand — no man does. Love ought to be strong enough not to yield, not to be beaten by such petty troubles" —

"Oh, say it is we who are weak, not Love!" she cried. But he went rushing on

as if he had not heard her, for his feeling swept him past her thought.

"I did not suppose you treasured up those little things. I would not have hurt you for — for — Forgive me, Perley!"

"No, me, me!" she sobbed. "Forgive *me*, for I was most to blame. I always was. I always am. And I thought I had fretted you so! I thought you did not care any more — not so much. And I thought — and I cried every night about it" . . .

"Come here!" commanded the schoolmaster. He took her in his arms, and crushed her unfinished confession from her lips.

. . . . . .

They sat there till the dew fell. Rugby came out. But Rugby did not talk. And then Hazel whistled, and told him that she and Kathia Maiden were going to walk. So Rugby, limping, followed them.

The scented twilight shut in the husband and the wife. He bundled her in the afghan and the white shawl with awkward tender-

ness. An arm of iron and velvet helped her up the garden path. The house was silent and empty when they came into it. Through the vines on the piazza a slender moon looked in. Tremulously he said something to her about resting and saving her strength; and was she tired out? With bridal eyes they clasped and kissed again.

All the tenderness of all their married years gathered and grew upon them like a billow. They floated on a tide of joy. It seemed to them as new as if they were but this hour wedded, and as old as if they had lived in Eden before the serpent Care had tempted Love.

. . . . . .

They started like lovers disturbed at the stir of feet and laughter. Rugby pushed in and pulled at her white dress, and jealously pawed at the master's hand which held hers fast. Kathia Maiden, with Hazel on her arm, came up across the lawn.

"Hello, Mommer!" called the voice of

Youth that fears neither Love nor Care. "You and Popper look like a wedding up there, and don't you forget it!"

But Kathia Maiden, glancing up, smiled affectionately at the two who stood in the moonlit doorway, vine-flecked, and half unreal. Kathia Maiden was used to taking happiness by proxy. Hers were the sacrificial eyes. For the Kingdom of Home was within her.

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